THE OLDTIMERS

First Peoples of the

Land of the North Wind

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This book is dedicated with respect and affection to

Isabelle Moose, John B. Moose,
Rosie Dumas and the late Jacob Dumas
of South Indian Lake, Manitoba.

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PREFACE

It is common knowledge that there were Native people living in northern Manitoba long before the time of European contact. However, few know very much about these early people -- how they lived, where they came from and when, or how and why they came to inhabit the country referred to here as the Land of the North Wind.

What were these earlier people really like? How did they pass on to their children and the succeeding generations the skills needed to effectively deal with such a harsh environment? Did the North see rapid changes and frequent cultural innovations, or was there adherence to tradition and old values over long periods of time? Did developments in other parts of the continent affect and influence the way of life of the residents of northern Manitoba before the coming of Europeans, and if so, how?

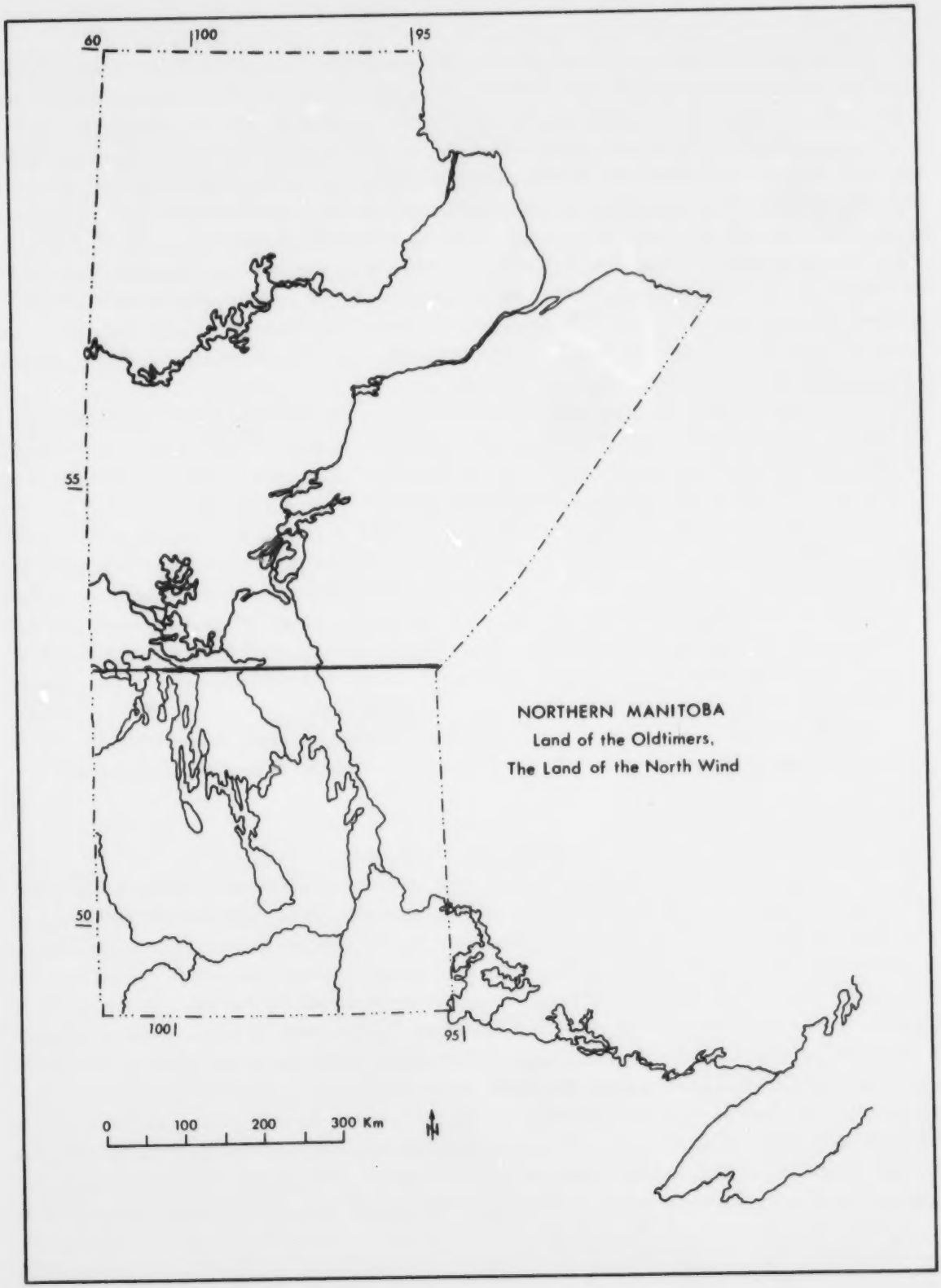
The customs and values of their descendants who continue to make their homes in the North, and descriptions of the Native peoples in the journals of early explorers, provide many insights into the lifeways of the Oldtimers. Other conclusions can be drawn from descriptions of groups who live in similar environments elsewhere in the world. While these methods might not give a full and totally accurate picture of the distant past, they probably provide a fairly close approximation. As time goes on, more questions are being answered; and as our knowledge grows, a better understanding of the Oldtimers is developing.

This book is about the peoples of the Land of the North Wind who developed complex and successful cultures over long periods of time. The Oldtimers were highly spiritual people who had a belief system which reflected their intimate and interdependant relationship with all the plant and animal beings with whom they shared the land. The people believed that physical, emotional and spiritual well-being was achieved by acknowledging these relationships through speech, prayer and ritual.

In order to bring to life the daily activities of the Oldtimers, this book presents drawings that show us how they conducted their lives and what they made and used in order to obtain their livelihood. There are no illustrations of broken stone tools or pottery fragments in this volume; instead, the people are described as they lived.

This story, while presented with as much accuracy as possible, also includes some speculative interpretation. For example, there is, as yet, no firm evidence of a continuous, unbroken sequence of peoples and cultures throughout the entire North. But rather than relate the history of the region as a series of abrupt endings and beginnings of cultural developments, clouded with grey areas in between, the view has been taken that for the past 3500 years, some portion of the North has been occupied. From time to time, certain areas may have become uninhabited. Climatic change, forest fires, poor local hunting conditions all led, or may have led, to outmigration or even the extinction of small local populations due to starvation; but elsewhere, life went on without interruption. Taking the North as a whole, the region has seen continuous occupation by Native people for the last 3500 years, if not longer. Many northern Native residents, confident in their relationship to one or more of the branches of the earlier populations who inhabited the North, say with certainty that their cultural history can be traced from the earliest use of the land through to the present.

The authors also acknowledge that the earliest evidence of human habitation in the North -- equated with the "First People" in this book -- may well be superceded by even earlier evidence as time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goes on and study progresses, and that those who have been identified as the "First People" of 3500 years ago may well turn out to be relative late-comers as more information on northern history comes to light.

It should be noted that some of the names used in this book to identify the various peoples who have lived in the North differ from those readers might have encountered elsewhere. It is also important to realize at the outset that the naming of these archaeologically identified cultures was done by archaeologists, usually after a nearby place, and not by the peoples of whom we speak.

In other books, readers will find the "First People" and the "Forest Dwellers" identified as "Shield Archaic" or as simply "Archaic". These names were first applied because the peoples' campsites are found on the great rocky Precambrian Shield of west-central Canada, and are very old. The "Northern Strangers" are elsewhere identified as "Pre-Dorset" and "Dorset", both of which have been grouped under the rubric "Arctic Small Tool Tradition", or even "ASTt".

Names given to the early groups are used mainly to facilitate identification of them, and do not constitute actual historical fact. The names used to identify some of the early peoples of the North are intended to identify them as residents of a specific area. It is not the intention of the authors to supplant the established archaeological identifications found elsewhere in scholarly texts.

It is hoped that this book about the First Peoples of the Land of the North Wind will provide a better understanding of the legacy which they have left behind. While many of the questions about how the people lived will never be answered by cultural historians, it is nonetheless hoped that the present-day residents of Manitoba will better understand these past inhabitants of their province through reading the following story. It is also hoped that this book will bring about a greater interest in the past, and that a basic understanding of the events that have occurred in this area of the province over the ages will be developed by its readers.

Should the reader wish to further explore the culture history of the Oldtimers, other publications are available on this subject. Some are listed at the back of this book under "References".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks are due to the many people who offered advice and constructive criticism during the preparation of this book. Dr. Jennifer Brown of the History Department, University of Winnipeg, read the first draft and in so doing has added much to the final outcome. Katherine Pettipas of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature not only recommended improvements in the text, but was also of great assistance in developing the content of the drawings produced so well by Larry Jamieson. Caroline Trottier prepared the fine maps that accompany Larry's work. Dianne Cooley and Garry Robson of the Native Education Branch, Manitoba Department of Education, met with us to work out problems they had found in the way we had stated our interpretations of early Manitoba history. More importantly, they offered many positive ideas on how to improve the final product so that it would more faithfully reflect a Native view of information gathered from both archaeological and ethnological sources. Dan Thomas, also of Native Education, undertook a critical review of the manuscript; and William Dumas, who formerly taught at Hugh John MacDonald School in Winnipeg and is now at

Pukatawagan, Manitoba, offered much of his time and of himself to see a successful outcome to this project. Neal Putt, of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, was also forthcoming with numerous helpful suggestions, and Dr. Martha McCarthy of the History Section, Historic Resources Branch, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, provided much needed advice on the section dealing with the early fur trade. Vienna Badiuk, Information Writer with the Communication Branch, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, cheerfully applied her considerable editorial skills to the project.

We also wish to acknowledge those scholars from whose books and articles we so freely borrowed. They and their works are listed at the back under "References". We trust the way in which we have interpreted their work for a general audience meets with their approval.

Last but by no means least, we wish to thank Joan Wachs for her assistance and patience while typing the various drafts and final copy of this volume.

Leo Pettipas

General Editor

INTRODUCTION

Our Earth is very old; yet in its memory are all of the changes that have occurred and continue to occur throughout the North. Records and clues have been left across the face of the land that, similar to the track and sign of an animal, are there to be read if the tracker is skilled in understanding their meaning.

As in the progressions from day to night, season to season and year to year, Earth has changed many times in the past and continues to change today. Many generations ago, the land was very different from what it is now. The sum of all the changes that have occurred in the North has led to its present form.

THE ICE AGE

Several times, the northern areas of the Earth have been cloaked for long periods in thick mantles of ice. It is not certain what caused these Ice Ages, but it is known that the natural forces exerted by the ice have dramatically changed and reshaped the face of the North. The most recent Ice Age ended 7500 years ago, but previous periods of ice were also important to the formation of the North as it is known today. Most of the records of previous Ice Ages have been erased or buried by the most recent glaciers, and clues to these more remote periods are often difficult to find.

At the beginning of each Ice Age, the Earth grew cold due to a lowering of the temperature and a resulting deterioration of the climate. The snows that yearly blanketed the District of Keewatin and Labrador some 25,000 years ago did not melt completely. As more snow fell and the cycle of the seasons failed, the winters grew progressively longer and colder. The shorter summer months could not melt the previous years' build up, and as the snows accumulated, they were compressed into ice under their own weight. This frigid mass further influenced the weather, creating an even colder climate.

Eventually, over an exceedingly long period of time, the edges of these massive build-ups of ice and snow -- now glaciers some two kilometres thick -- began to move slowly toward one another. Formed in the Canadian Arctic, the two glaciers finally met in northern Manitoba, creating a continuous sheet of ice that eventually buried the entire province. The ice scoured the surface and removed the soils, sands and gravels, pushing them southward or incorporating them into its mass. It crushed the plants and tore them from their roots, and forced the animals to migrate. Even the bedrock, the roots of ancient mountains, was smothered, scraped and smoothed by the ice and the vast amounts of debris it contained. These bedrock outcrops now form parts of the shorelines and margins of Manitoba's northern waterways.

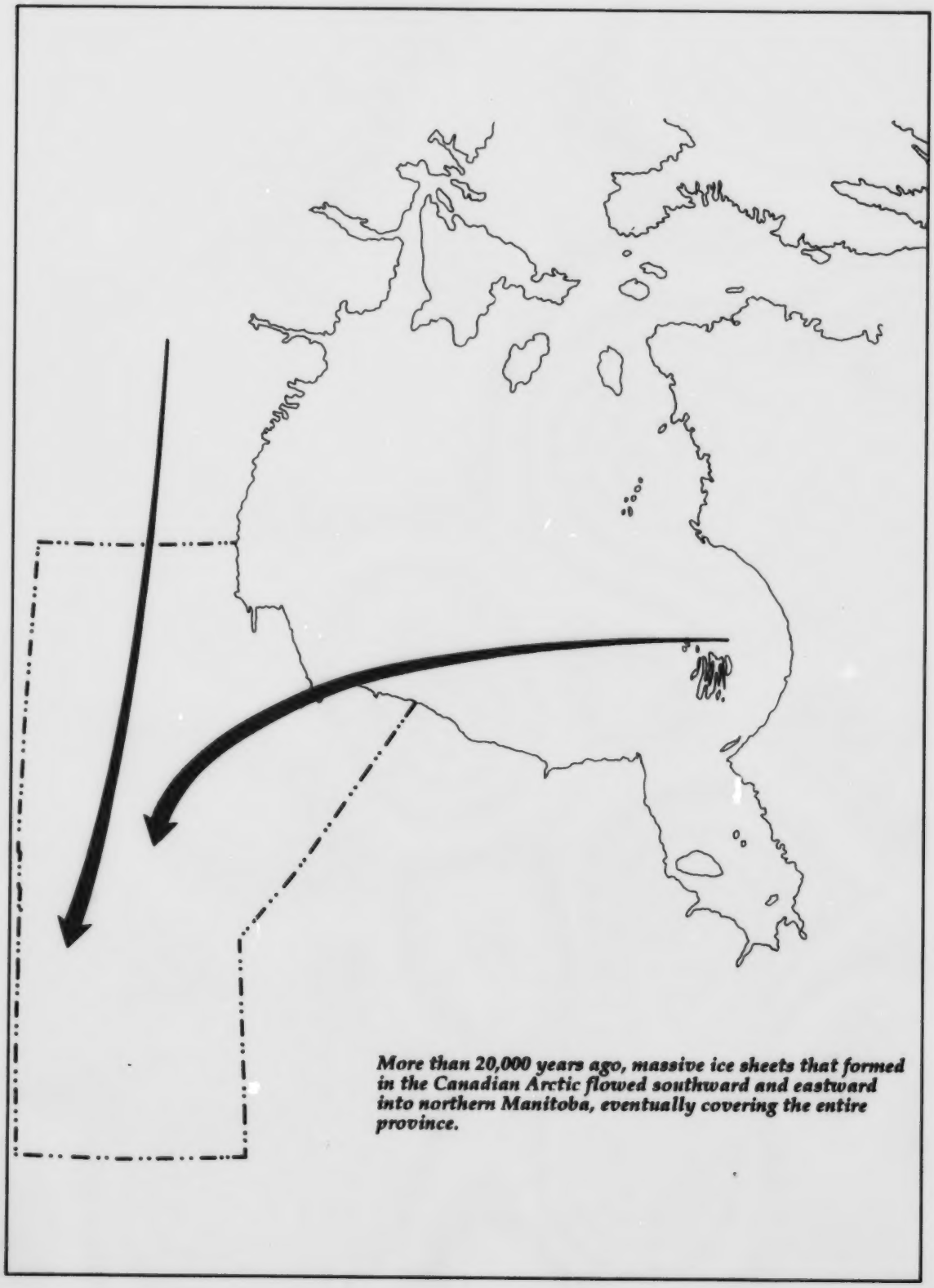
The ice that covered northern Manitoba was over 2000 metres thick and very heavy. The weight of the ice caused the land beneath it to sink like fresh snow beneath one's feet.

Finally, as slowly as it had formed, the ice began to melt as the climate changed and the temperatures warmed. Once again, no one knows what caused the change, but the result was a slow, gradual melting of the ice that had covered the land for so long. Over thousands of years, the ice melted from the south towards the north. And as the ice receded, other chapters in the story of the North were written upon the surface of the land. For example, once the heavy glacier had melted, the pressure it had

The glacier that covered northern Manitoba until about 7500 years ago was to leave a lasting legacy. Formed by the snows of countless winters, the ice ground its way relentlessly southward. The animals of pre-glacial times were forced to migrate and the plants in its path were smothered and killed. Rocks, sands, gravels and clays were incorporated into this mass of moving ice, and they too were slowly transported southward. The glacier caused the land beneath it to be pressed downward due to the massive weight of the ice. During the Ice Age, northern Manitoba was a bleak, sterile, lifeless expanse of ice and blowing snow.

Beginning about 15,000 years ago, important changes came about due to a change in the climate. Far to the south, the edge of the ice began to melt, and over the next several thousand years, the Land of the North Wind became ice-free. However, this newly "deglaciated" terrain was very different from what it had been before the ice had begun its advance. The melting glacier had left behind on the surface all of the rocks, gravels, clays and sands that it contained. The old river beds and lake basins had been filled with debris. In some areas, huge piles of glacial deposit had been left to mark the former margin of the melting glacier. In other areas, the beds of rivers which once flowed under the ice revealed their ancient courses in the form of high gravel ridges trending across the surface of the land.

During these early post-glacial times, much of the North was covered by a huge lake created from the waters of the melting glacier. New river and lake systems were formed as meltwater flowed into this lake. Later, when the lake drained away, these systems would be completed while changing seasons brought rains and snows once again to the land. Immediately after the melting of the ice, no plants grew in the area and no animals or fish had yet made their appearance.



More than 20,000 years ago, massive ice sheets that formed in the Canadian Arctic flowed southward and eastward into northern Manitoba, eventually covering the entire province.

exerted on the earth was released, and the land surface began to rise. Today the land in the North is still rising at the rate of a metre per century. Further, extensive "till" deposits -- the clays, sands, pebbles and boulders initially caught up in the moving glacier -- were released as the ice melted. Glacial till forms most of the present land surface north of Cedar Lake and in the northwestern portion of the province of Manitoba.

"End moraines", which formed when the rate of melting around the glaciers' edges was equal to their advance, also occur in the North. These end moraines are massive deposits of debris which built up as the southward-moving ice melted and left its burden of till, only to be replaced by more moving ice which, in turn, melted and added more debris to the existing deposit. End moraines appear as huge ridges and are easily recognized wherever they are found. One of the largest end moraines in Manitoba runs in an arc from Long Point on Lake Winnipeg to Cormorant Lake northeast of The Pas.

Highly visible ridges of sands and gravels of a different kind also snake their way across some areas of the North. These formations, called "eskers", were left behind by rivers that once flowed through and under the glacial ice. First built up within and beneath the mass of the glacier, the raised deposits became visible when the enclosing ice finally melted and disappeared. In many places they lack vegetation, or are covered with only thin moss and lichen growth and an occasional clump of low bush.

After the people arrived in the North, they used the eskers as trails to move across the land. These features were natural highways for the ancient travellers.

Certain types of boulders and cobbles of rock which had been part of the glacial ice and till, produced a sharp edge when split apart. When chipped and shaped, they became the stone tools that the people needed in order to survive, and the knowledge as to which rocks to choose was handed down through many generations.

LAKE AGASSIZ

To anyone familiar with spring break-up, it is not difficult to imagine the vast torrents of water that were released by the melting ice sheets when the last Ice Age came to an end. The resulting meltwater formed a huge lake that at various times covered most of Manitoba and parts of Saskatchewan, northern Ontario, and the adjoining states. The water initially flowed southward or eastward, depending on the position of the ice front. The land in the south, released first from the pressure of the heavy ice, began to rise earlier than that in the north, and eventually these exits were closed. The areas further north, more recently under the ice, remained depressed for a longer period, and the water ponded in these lower areas. Eventually, as the melting of the glacier progressed northward, the waters of the huge lake drained away into Hudson Bay.

Today, Lakes Manitoba, Winnipeg, and Winnipegosis are the remnants of this once massive lake -- which was for a time the largest lake in all of North America. Those areas that were under water for long periods of time can now be identified by the thick deposits of clay that were left behind when Lake Agassiz finally drained away. One example is the Grass River Basin, in which a huge expanse of lake deposits

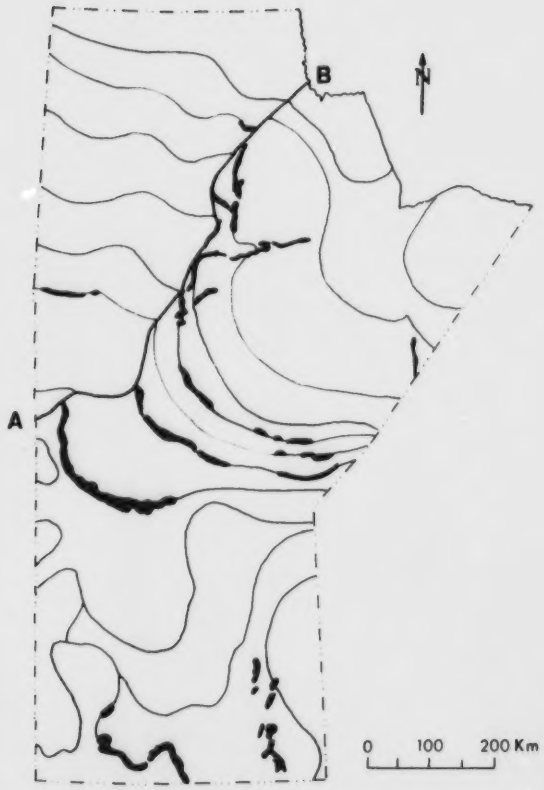
Northern Manitoba was a barren, lifeless land of rocks, sands, muds and gravels when the mantle of ice that had covered the area for so long finally melted away about 7500 years ago.

Soon, plants began to grow on the debris that had been left behind when the glacier disappeared. In sheltered areas, protected from the blowing sands and dust of summer storms and howling winter blizzards, small patches of vegetation began to appear.

Lake Agassiz drained away about 7500 years ago, and over the following centuries, plants, shrubs and trees grew in its place.

Animals which ate plants were attracted to northern Manitoba as the land turned green. Following in their tracks came other animals which fed on the flesh of these plant-eaters. Fish also came to the waters of the developing lake and river systems of the North.

The transformation of a barren and lifeless landscape to one rich in plants and animals was to set the stage for the arrival of the First People in the Land of the North Wind. However, some 4000 years would pass before people made their appearance in northern Manitoba.



The thin lines on this map indicate the positions of the edge of the ice sheet as the glaciers gradually melted northward. The dark areas depict the end moraines that mark the former positions of the ice margin. The line A-B represents the line of contact between the two glaciers which together buried Manitoba during the last Ice Age.

extends all the way from Lake Winnipeg to Southern Indian Lake, and from Leaf Rapids to Oxford Lake.

When Lake Agassiz drained away, it also left behind beach ridges that trace its former shorelines. Good examples of Lake Agassiz beach ridges occur along Public Trunk Highway #6 between Grand Rapids and Ponton. Now seen as deposits of sand and gravel through the North, they, like the eskers, form natural, well-drained trails that cross the countryside. They also favour the growth of open jack pine forests, rather than dense stands of black spruce of the sort that cloak so much of the North. These open forests eventually formed ideal camping areas, and travel along them was relatively easy when compared to the muskeg, mosses and tangled black spruce forest found in lower lying areas.

THE GREENING OF THE LAND

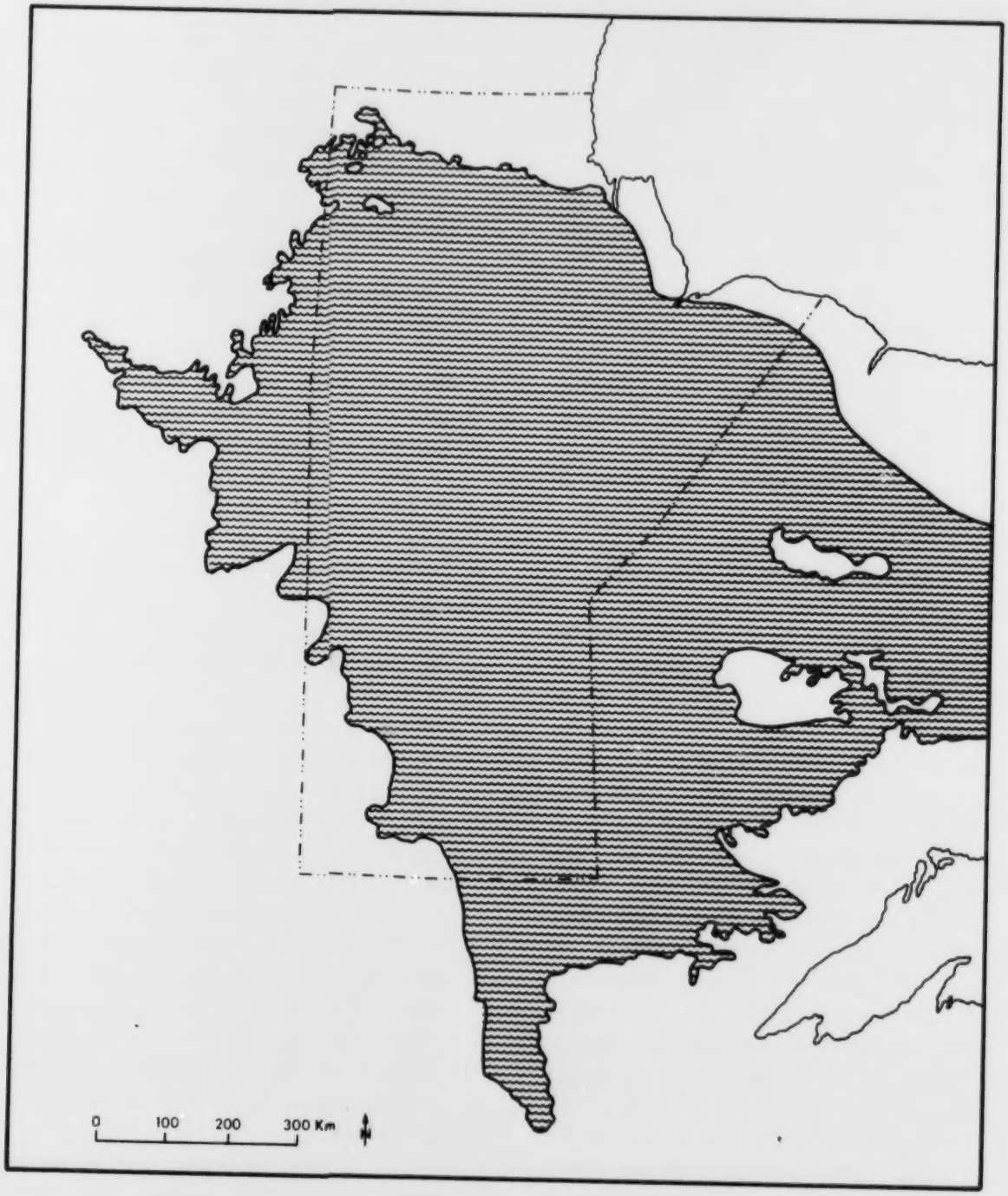
Shortly after the glacial ice finally melted and the resulting waters had drained away, plants began to grow on the debris of till, clay and sand that littered the terrain. Each species of plant grew in places to which it was best suited. Birch trees began to flourish on well-drained land, while willow grew near swamps. The climate was slightly warmer than it is now, and because of this the distribution of plant life at that time was somewhat different.

Today it is common knowledge that as one goes further north fewer kinds of plants are seen and the trees become smaller and stunted, eventually disappearing where the conditions are particularly rigorous. This is due to the climate. During a warmer, wetter climatic period, greater growth is possible and plants better suited to these conditions are more successful. If, however, the climate becomes cooler, the plants needing warmer conditions die out and others better suited to lower temperatures take their place. Thus, if conditions suitable to forest growth in the far North deteriorate, the trees will die out. The land becomes tundra, covered in mosses, lichens and low shrubs, with stunted trees growing in only the most favoured areas. The dead roots and trunks that remain become testimony to a changing climate.

Seventy-five hundred years ago, Lake Agassiz had drained away, and the North became warmer. The forests grew quickly and spread northward. Six thousand years ago, the treeline, where general tree growth ends and open tundra begins, was situated 250 kilometres north of its present position. Thereafter, the North experienced relatively warm conditions; but then, about 3500 years ago, the climate became harsher and the trees in the far north were killed off by the colder weather conditions. From that time to the present, the northern forest edge has been shifting northward or southward up to 100 kilometres from its present position, in response to either the warmer or colder conditions of the time.

The replacement of one type of vegetation with another also occurred from time to time in the southern portions of northern Manitoba. When the climate became colder, the southern edge of the spruce forest shifted southward and replaced the mixed forest. When warmer conditions prevailed, the opposite occurred. The natural cycle of weather and plant growth was determined by the climate of the times.

Within the major forest divisions there were other smaller, but very important, environments. Areas of marshland, zones where reindeer moss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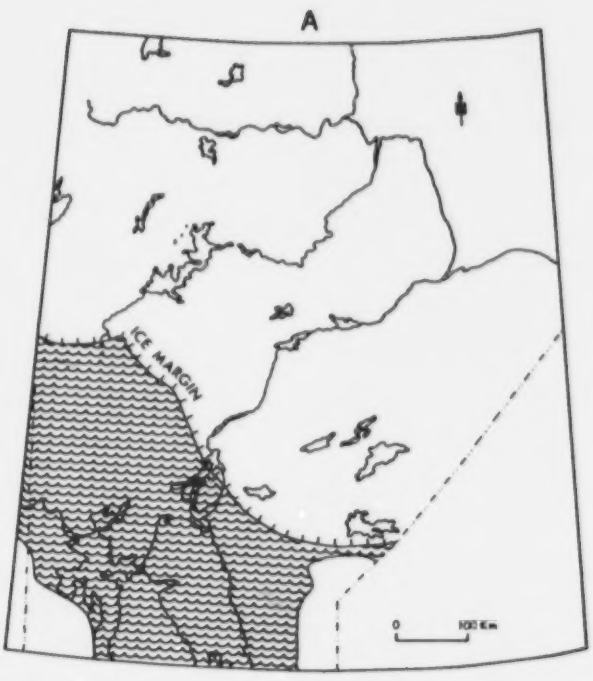
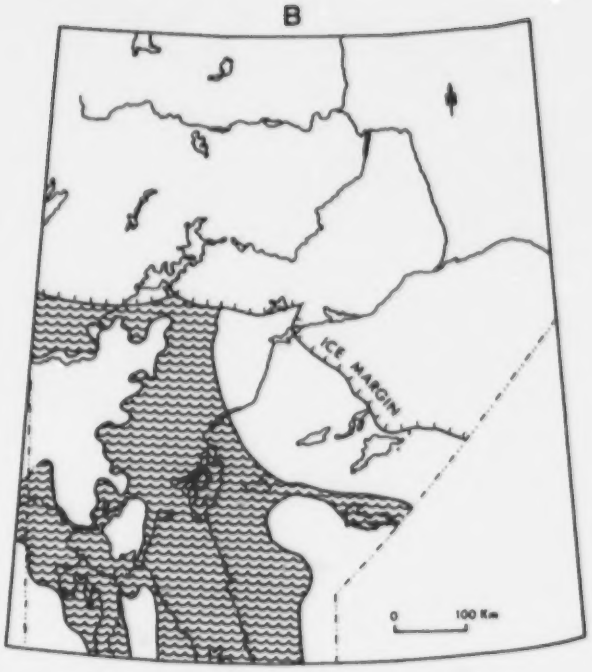
The meltwater from the glacier that had long covered the Land of the North Wind at various times inundated much of Manitoba, parts of Saskatchewan and northern Ontario, and portions of the adjoining states to the south. When the ice first melted and Lake Agassiz began to form, its waters flowed to the south and the east, eventually emptying into the ocean. To the north, the lake was bounded by the still-melting glacier.

The weight of the ice had caused the land beneath it to sink. Since the land began to rise as soon as the weight of the melting ice was released, southern areas rose earlier than did those in the North. As the land in the south rose, the southern exits from the lake were closed, and as the ice continued to melt, the area covered by the lake expanded northwards as well. Finally, after many centuries, the ice in the North disappeared and most of the waters of glacial Lake Agassiz flowed into Hudson Bay.

The areas that were released from the waters of the glacial lake soon began to support populations of plants and animals. River and lake systems were formed in areas that were once the bed of the glacial lake. Fish from rivers lying to the south and west began to have access to the northern systems, and they soon began to populate the North. The stage was being set for the coming of the people; however, it would still be another 3000 years before the First People were to come to the Land of the North Wind.



9000 years ago



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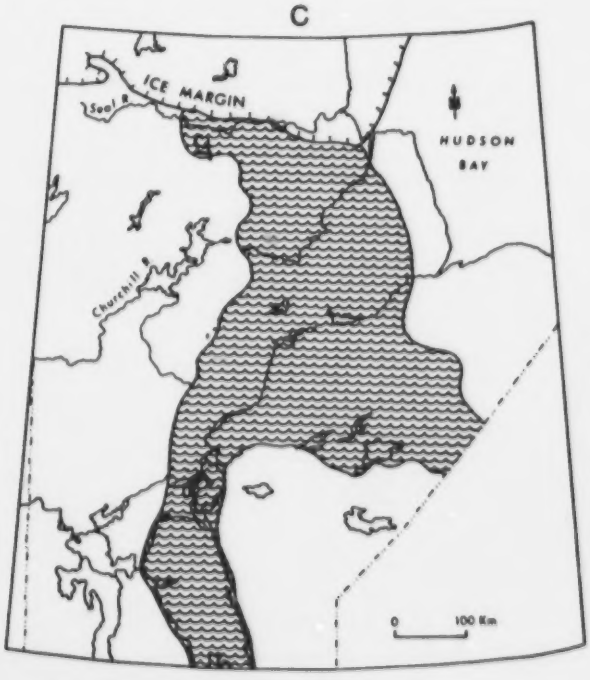

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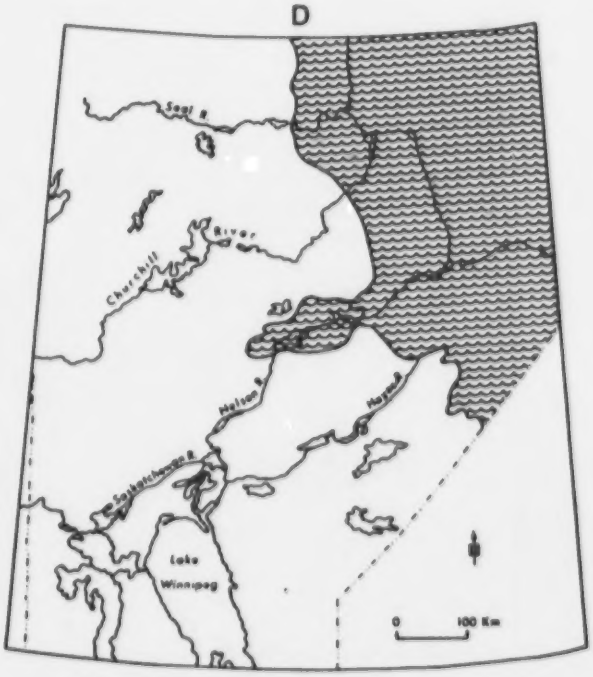
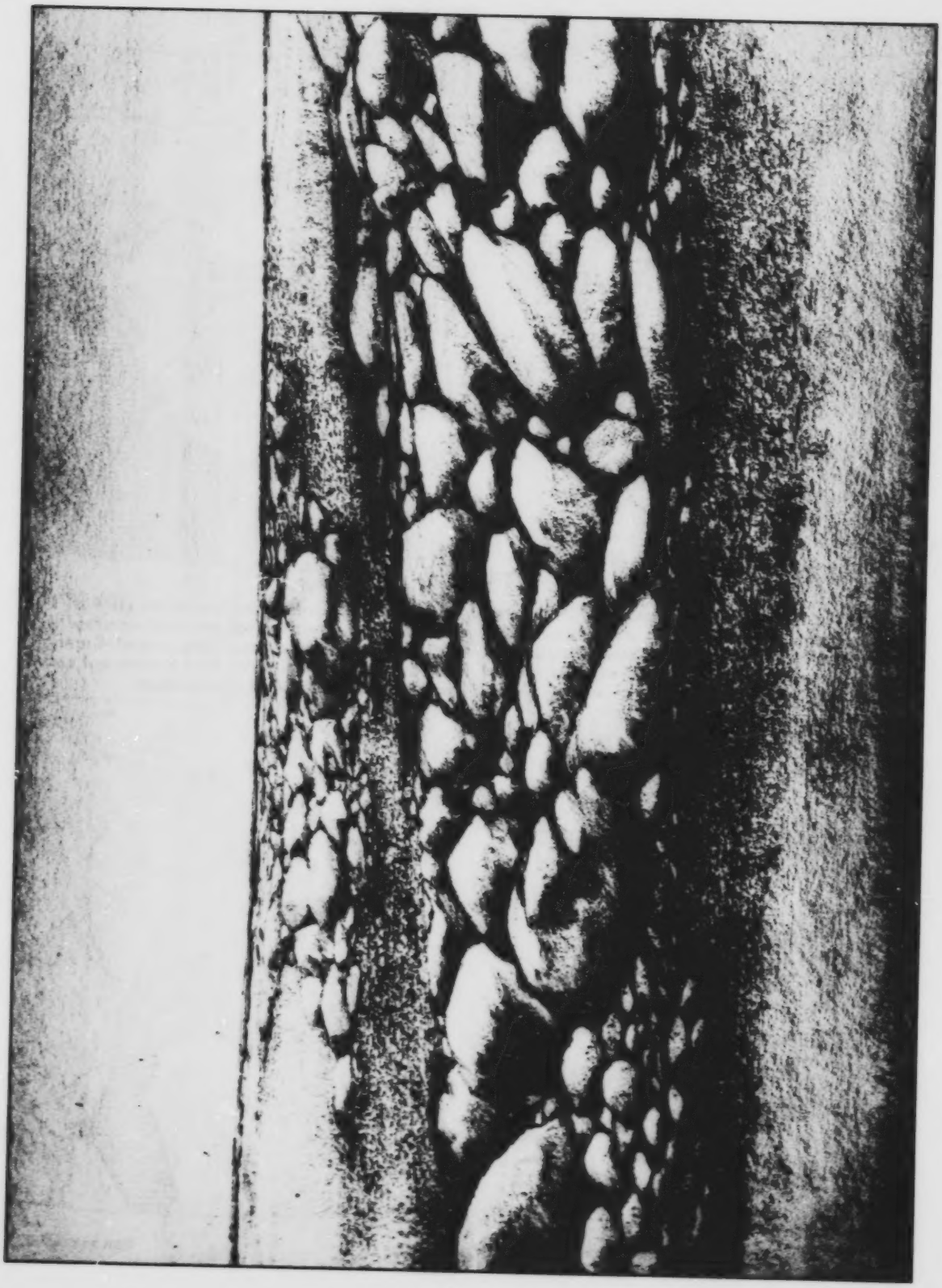


7500 years ago

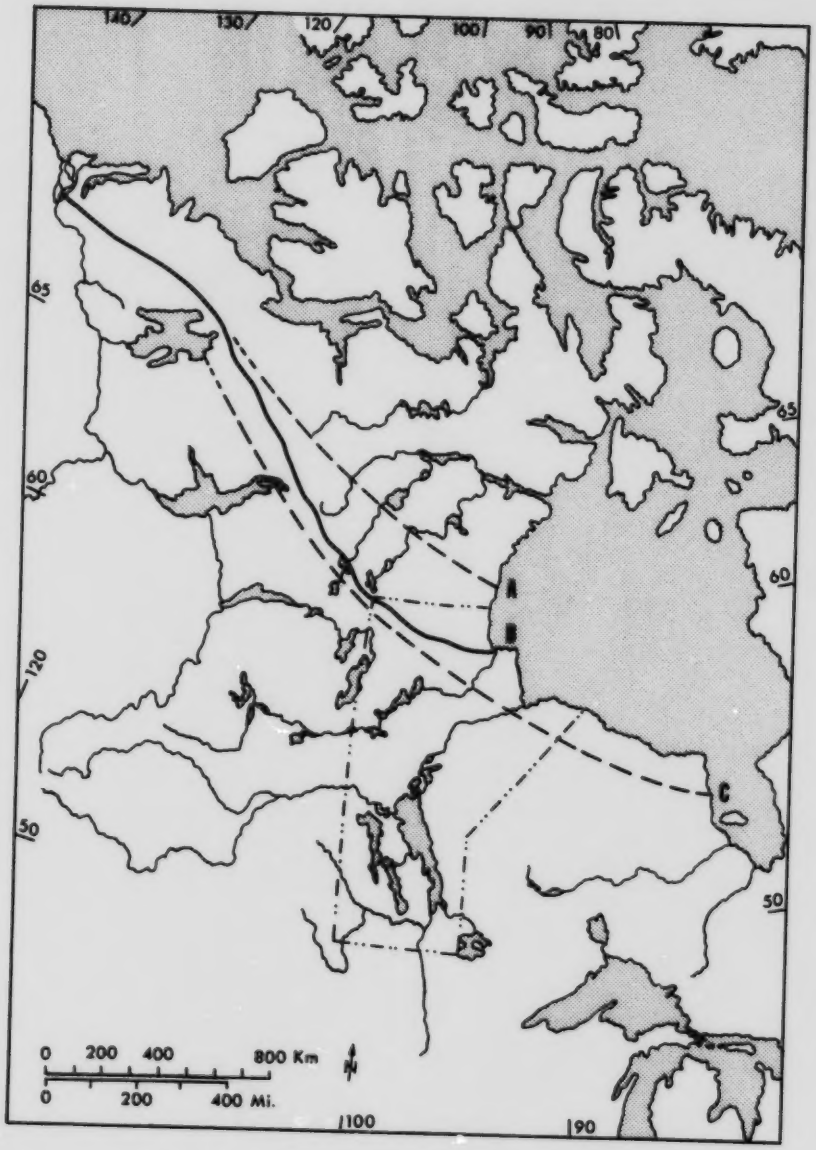
Between about 9000 and 7500 years ago, northern Manitoba experienced the gradual disappearance of the ice sheet. At the same time, glacial Lake Agassiz spread over and eventually disappeared from the region. Toward the end of this 1500-year period, Hudson Bay extended much farther inland than it does today because the weight of the ice had pushed the land downward and the waters of the bay covered these low-lying areas (Figure D) after the ice had disappeared.



During and after the melting of the great glacier that had covered the land for so long, a huge lake, formed by the glacier's meltwater, covered much of Manitoba.

The vast area of this lake either grew or shrank at various times, depending on whether its southern and eastern exits were closed or opened. When the barrier of ice along its northern margin melted away most of the water drained into Hudson Bay. Lakes Winnipeg, Winnipegosis and Manitoba are the remnants of Lake Agassiz -- which was for a time the largest lake in North America.

Whenever the lake was at a stable elevation for lengthy periods of time, summer storms caused large waves to lash the shoreline and create raised beach ridges along the water's edge. A series of these beaches, each higher or lower than the others, was created across the Land of the North Wind. In some areas, huge rocks transported in the ice of the glacier were revealed by the waves pounding against the shore and removing the sands and clays which had surrounded them. In other areas, sands and gravels were formed, by continuous wave action, into flat beach ridges which eventually became campsites for the people. Such areas soon supported open jack pine forest as plants began to grow in the barren area. Since travel through these areas was easier than attempting to move through the tangled black spruce and muskegs of lower elevations, the beaches also became trails used by people to travel from one area to another in the Land of the North Wind.



Within the past 4000 years or so, the northern treeline has changed position several times. For example, some 3800 years ago, the treeline coincided with line "A" on the map, well to the north of its present position, which is line "B". Around 800 years ago, the treeline was situated roughly along the line indicated "C". During the intervening 2700 years, the position of the treeline fluctuated between these two extremes several times.

grew, and places of new growth resulting from forest fires each allowed for a greater variety of plant life. Such variation in the environment increased the overall number of plant types that grew in the North. Within this increased variety were plants which were useful to humans, or needed by certain types of animals for their very survival.

Try to imagine the North without swamps and lichens. What kinds of animal life would find it difficult, if not impossible, to live in the region? Ducks that eat plant life would never venture into the area, and the beaver would find it impossible to survive. The woodland caribou, which rely on the reindeer moss, would avoid the region if its main food source no longer grew. These few examples serve to illustrate the inter-relationship between plants and animals.

THE ANIMALS

Directly related to climatic and vegetation zones are the types of animals which inhabit them. Since it has been seen that any major climatic change can alter the vegetation, it is easy to appreciate that the animal populations, as part of this system, will also change in numbers and variety.

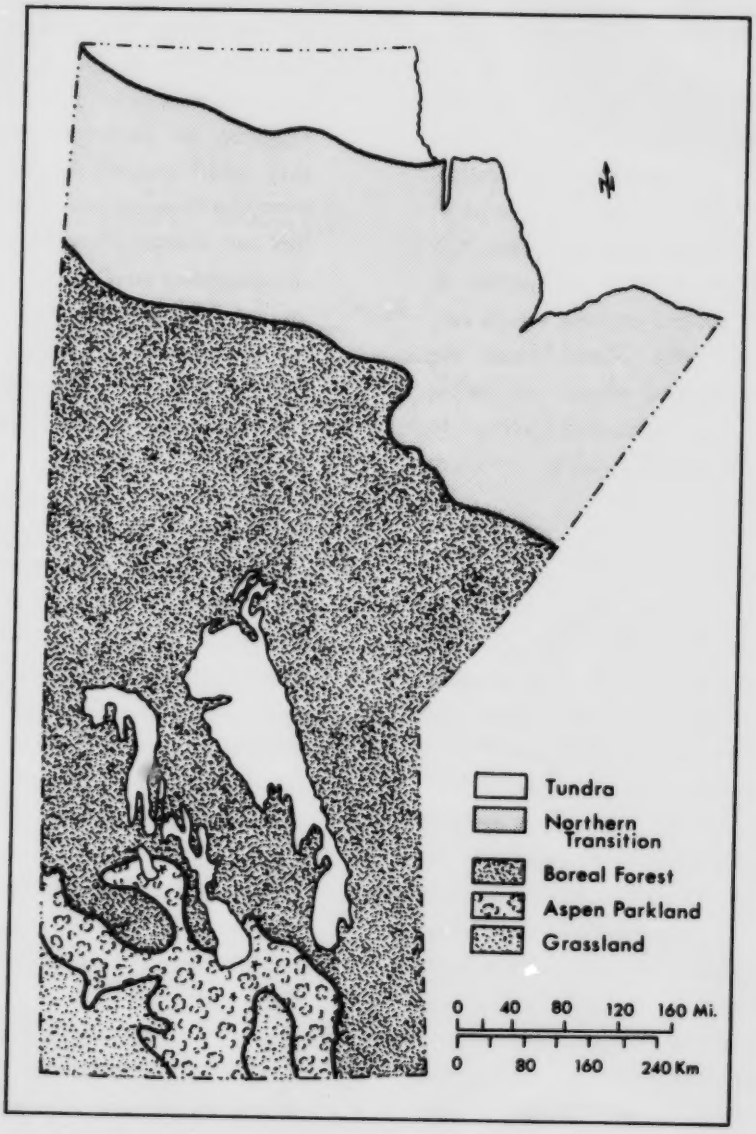
The icy desolation of glacial times forced all animals to move out of the North. This land of ice could provide neither food, shelter nor protection, and therefore it was abandoned. Later, as the climate warmed and the glacier slowly melted, those areas where plants grew hosted the newly-returned animal populations. However, since most of the region was covered with water from the melting glacier, few such areas were actually available.

It was not until Lake Agassiz drained away, the land was dry, and vegetation covered the countryside that large populations of animals could live throughout the reopened North. As the forests grew and the other plant communities established themselves, animals returned -- each species finding its niche in the landscape -- to thrive and produce the next generation. Fish, too, returned to environments within which they could once again live and reproduce. How did these events occur? Where did the fish and animals come from to populate the re-awakening land?

The answers to these questions lie mainly to the south and to the northwest. Fish species survived the Ice Age south of the ice sheet -- in unglaciated areas of the central United States. When the ice melted away, they returned by way of the rivers of meltwater that flowed southward and eastward out of Lake Agassiz. The flathead chub and goldeye entered southern Manitoba via early connections with the Upper Missouri River, while other species such as suckers, walleye, whitefish, pike and lake trout came from the Upper Mississippi. Lake trout also populated northern Manitoba from the Great Lakes.

Other fish, such as the round whitefish, survived the time of the Ice far to the northwest, in a refuge of unglaciated land in the Yukon. After the ice melted, they gradually moved eastward along the newly developing drainage systems, eventually arriving in the Land of the North Wind. In this way, the waters of the North were slowly repopulated and became rich in fish.

Land animals also returned as soon as conditions became favourable to their ways of life. Forced to migrate as the glacier began its slow but relentless journey


Tundra
Northern Transition
Boreal Forest
Aspen Parkland
Grassland
0 40 80 120 160 Mi.
0 80 160 240 Km

This map shows the major vegetation zones of Manitoba of which three -- the boreal forest, northern transition, and tundra -- occur within the Land of the North Wind.

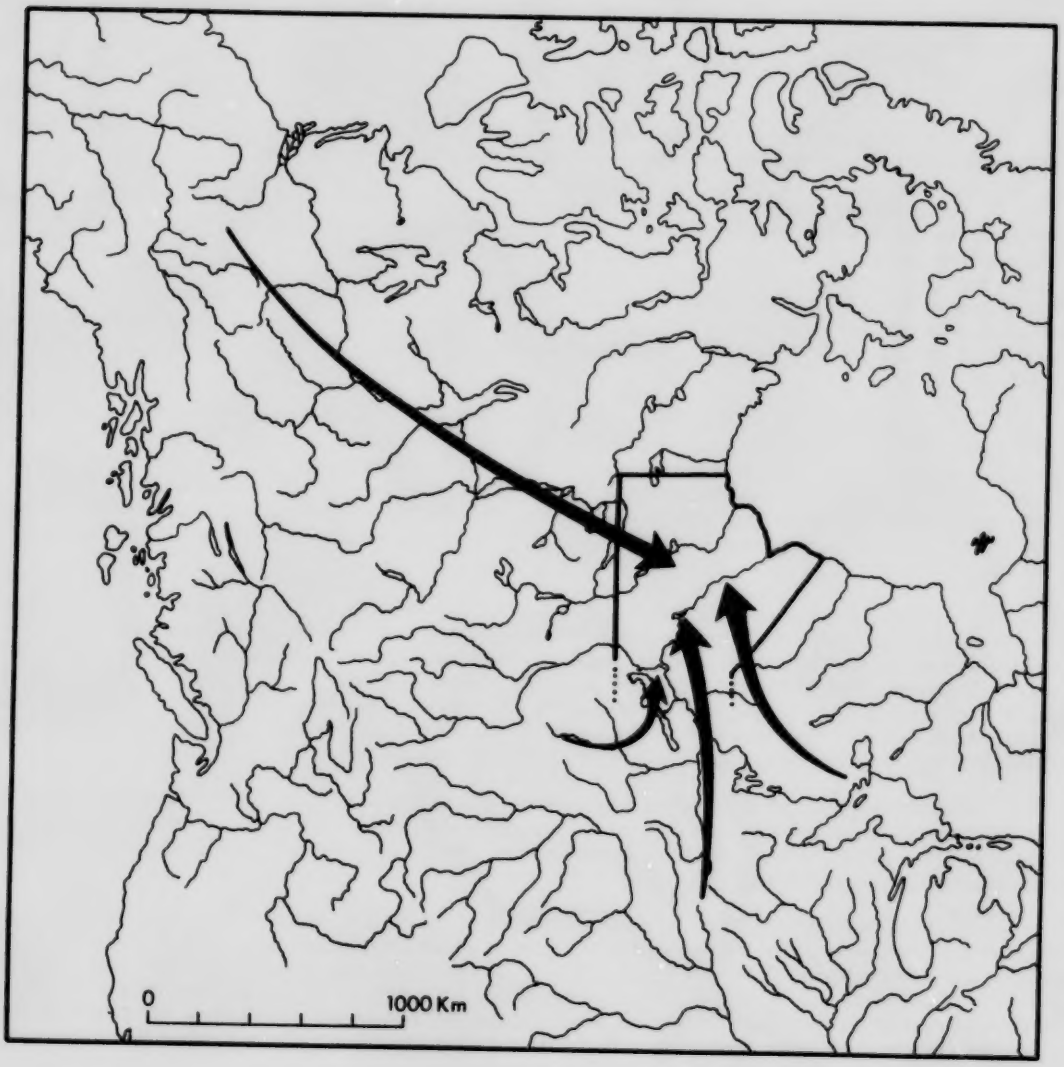
The boreal forest is part of a broad circumpolar zone between the aspen parkland and the northern transition zone. The dominant conifers -- spruce, pine, tamarack, and fir -- are all well-adapted to the rigorous boreal environment. In the southern part, aptly termed "mixed woods", poplars and birches mingle with the conifers and become locally important, usually after some disturbance such as fire. The Saskatchewan River Delta area forms an important part of the mixed woods section of the boreal forest. Mixed woods also occur along the upper Nelson River on clayey soils, and between the Nelson and Churchill rivers on clay or granite-derived soils of the Canadian Shield.

North of the mixed woods the vegetation takes on a predominantly evergreen aspect, with fewer signs of broadleaved trees which are less adapted to the rigors of northern climates. In this part of the forest, aspen and birch make up much less of upland communities, and the important trees are black and white spruce, balsam fir, and jack pine. Exposed bedrock and lowland areas support black spruce and tamarack, while jack pine is common on the drier parts of ridges and slopes. White spruce occurs predominantly on upland plains and, together with fir, aspen, and balsam poplar, is found along rivers and streams.

North of the closed coniferous or boreal forest and south of the tundra lies the northern transition zone, in which the forest becomes increasingly open as the treeline is reached. Climatic conditions become more rigorous and perennially frozen ground (permafrost) becomes progressively more widespread. The more southerly portion of the transition zone forms a parklike landscape on uplands with scattered black spruce surrounded by low shrubs and a mat of lichens. Prominent among the lichens is reindeer moss, an important winter food of caribou. On sand ridges and river floodplains, white spruce forest predominates. Extensive bogs and muskegs cover low-lying areas.

In the more northerly section of the transition zone, the upland forest becomes more sparse, and the trees are more stunted and deformed until they ultimately disappear. Protected ravines shelter clumps of black spruce and dwarf birch, and there are stands of tamarack and white spruce on river flats, where willow and dwarf birch shrubs also occur.

In the extreme northern portion of the province, tundra communities become the prevailing cover of the landscape. Stunted trees of white spruce, black spruce, and tamarack occur only in the most favoured locations. One such black spruce near Churchill was found to be 300 years old, but had grown to a height of only 7 metres. Where drainage is poor, sedges, dwarf willow, and a variety of arctic herbs make up the plant cover. Although seemingly barren and forbidding, the tundra is a colourful delight during the flowering season when a host of delicate blooms cover the landscape.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During the glacial period, fish remained in abundance to the south of Manitoba. Later, the northern region was repopulated via the outlets of the glacial lakes and species of land animals that had survived south of the glacial ice also advanced northward as suitable conditions slowly developed.

Populations of animals and fish had survived in other areas that had remained ice-free throughout the glacial period. One such area was in the Yukon far to the northwest of Manitoba. These populations expanded when conditions moderated and the ice melted away. Eventually they made their way to Manitoba along the developing river and lake systems, or across the reopened countryside of the post-glacial period. This process took a considerable amount of time, for not only did the populations have to expand over great distances; the conditions suitable to their survival also had to develop. Proper water temperatures and sufficient food resources had to be available to the fish, as did plant resources suitable to the ways of life of the land animals, before these creatures could survive. Populations of flesh-eating animals could only survive if the species upon which they preyed were present in sufficient numbers. Eventually, all of these conditions developed and the Land of the North Wind became an environment hosting a rich and varied population of plants, fish, birds and animals.

across the land, they too found refuge on the south, away from the glacier's edge, or to the west in those few areas left unscarred by the ice. When the ice finally melted away and the waters had drained, animal populations once again found environments suitable to them, and they flourished. Barren ground caribou spent the summers in the far North beyond the treeline, and annually moved into the forests to the south to spend the winter. Moose, woodland caribou, bear and a wide range of other animals adapted to a boreal forest environment developed sizeable populations and lived according to the laws of survival.

In the southwestern areas, where The Pas now stands, the climate was somewhat milder than it is today and even the bison were able to prosper. Later, when conditions became cooler and the open deciduous forest gave way to closed coniferous forest, the bison were forced to leave. The area then became home to animals such as moose and woodland caribou that were best suited to this new environment.

Without the complex variety of environments found in the North, some of the plants and animals that came to live here could not have existed. Even today, the disappearance of only one type of life form can set off a series of events that will change this delicate balance.

THE PRECURSORS

The distant ancestors of those who were to become the First People of the Land of the North Wind were originally from the south. Seven thousand years ago, they lived on the Great Plains of west-central North America and were hunters of the countless bison that roamed the area. The warmer, drier temperatures of the changing climate eventually led to a widespread drought which forced the bison to move northward as conditions deteriorated. The people followed the herds into the Peace River district of Alberta and the country about Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories.

Eventually, in their quest for bison, some of these early hunters moved so far north that they began to encounter herds of barren ground caribou that wintered in the forests of the Northwest Territories. At first, small groups of these bison hunters likely hunted the caribou only in the forest and did not follow them on to the tundra unless bison were scarce. As time passed, small groups of these hunters learned more about the ways of the caribou, and some began to see caribou as their main food supply. In due course they learned how to live both along the forest edge and on the tundra, and after a few generations the caribou herds became their main source of food. At the time, the forest edge was much further north than it is now due to the warmer climate.

For the next one hundred and fifty generations, the people followed this northern way of life. Subsequent climatic change would eventually bring their descendants to the Land of the North Wind where they would become the first permanent residents of northernmost Manitoba.

THE FIRST PEOPLE

One hundred and fifty generations ago, the people were on the move. To the south a new land lay before them that promised all that was necessary for them to

live a better life. Carrying their possessions on their backs, and pulling hides full of the tools and clothing, they crossed the open tundra. The heavy burdens were shared bythe women and the children of the group, and while some of the hunters broke trail, others situated themselves at various places within the column, always ready to protect and to hunt.

The thin line of travellers formed the only movement on the otherwise barren landscape. As they walked across the fresh snows and new ice of early winter, they entered areas of dead trees and gnarled roots. In some places, recent fires had swept over much of the countryside. Caribou hunters, they followed the herd towards the southeast into a forested land where wood was again plentiful and the people no longer had to rely on small willow sticks for fuel.

The landscape of trees was different but not altogether foreign to them. For nearly one hundred and fifty generations, their ancestors had lived well to the north, hunting the great caribou herds on the open tundra during the warm months and moving into the northern fringe of trees to the south during the winter. The caribou herds had replaced their distant ancestors' prey, the bison, when the people had moved into the Northwest Territories near the beginning of time.

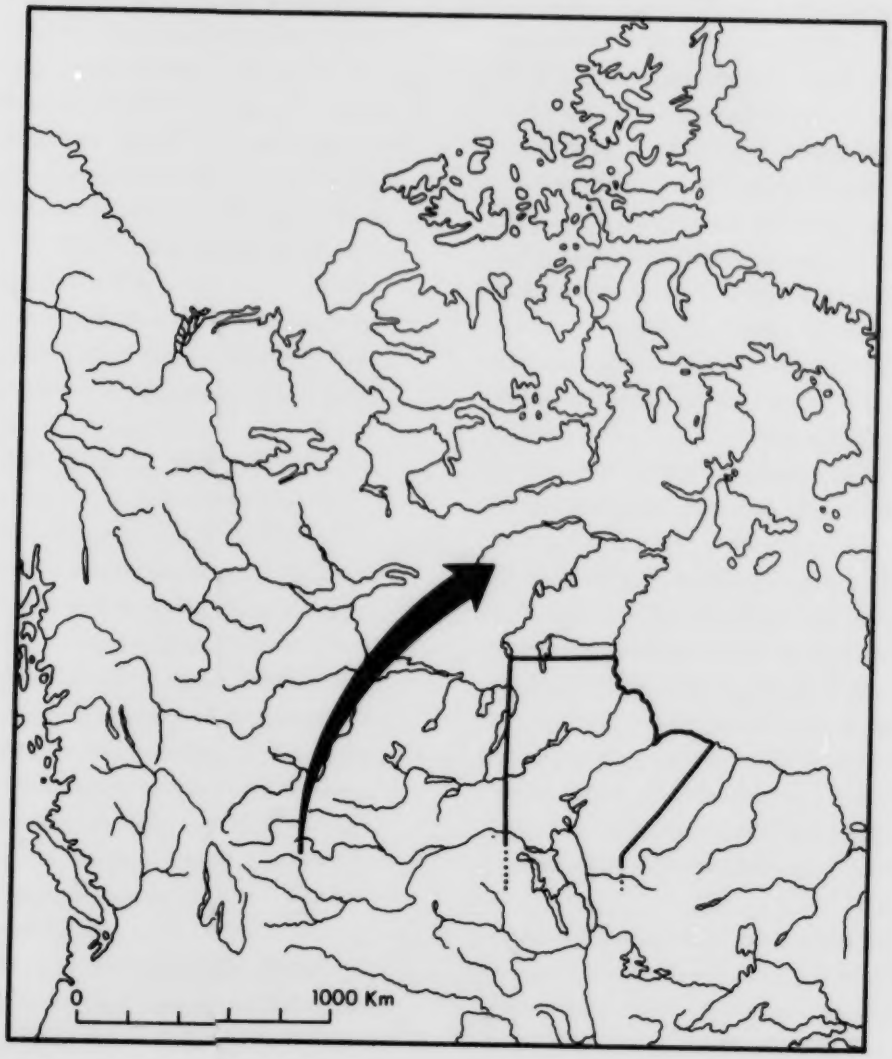
But then the climate became colder -- so cold, in fact, that the northern fringe of trees did not regenerate itself after being burned off, and the treeline was displaced well to the south. The people's way of making a living became more difficult in the North due to these changes, and movement, as always, was necessary if they were to survive.

The people were now further south and east than they had ever been before. Caribou became plentiful as the people headed southeast towards the morning sun. Their hunt was aided by the raven, a partner of the wolf packs which also hunted the caribou. Ravens tumbled in the sky and their call was constantly heard. They lived off the scraps left behind by the wolves and the human hunters.

The caribou did not fail the hunters, who knew much about finding and killing this gift from the Creator. For generations beyond memory, the caribou had given themselves to the hunters and provided them with food, clothing and shelter. The lives of the hunter and the hunted had become interwoven -- the caribou provided life to the people and for this it was respected as a friend.

THE FOREST DWELLERS

The forested land was different from the northern tundra -- and became more so as adventurous individuals of the band moved further south. There were other kinds of animals in the forest, and they existed in greater numbers than the people had ever seen before. The moose or great antlered deer -- only rarely seen in the open lands to the far North -- were plentiful. They tended to be solitary animals, however, and unlike the barren ground caribou, they only grouped together at certain times of the year. While they provided much meat and could also be used to clothe and shelter the people, they were more difficult to hunt. Yet as seasons passed, some of the hunters learned to stalk and kill these animals so well that the seasonal arrival of barren ground caribou became less important to the group for survival.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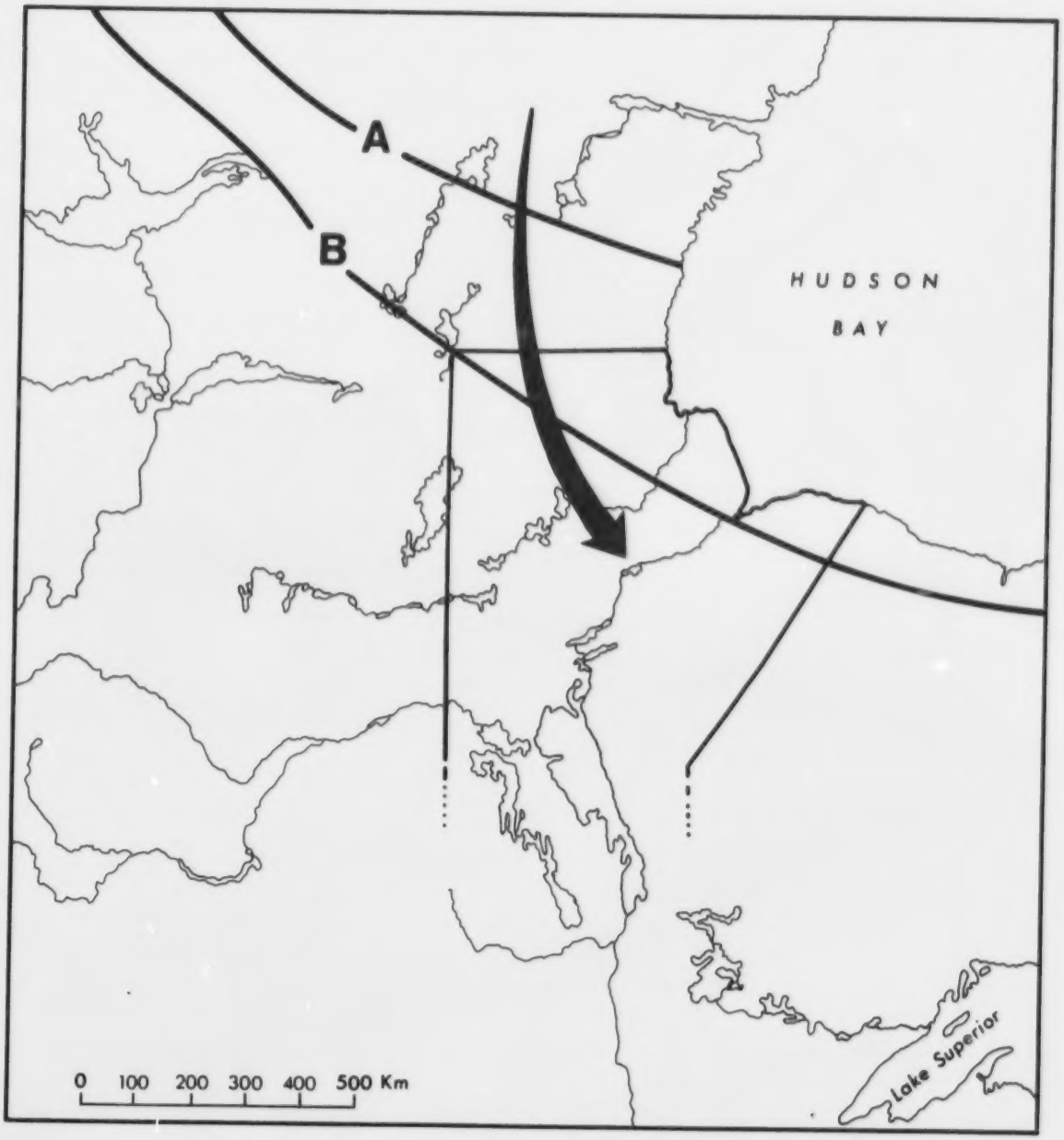
The distant ancestors of those who were to become the First People of the Land of the North Wind were originally from the south. Seven thousand years ago, they lived on the Great Plains of west-central North America and were hunters of the countless bison that roamed the area. The warmer, drier temperatures of the changing climate eventually led to a widespread drought which forced the bison to move northward as conditions deteriorated. The people followed the herds.

Eventually, some of these early hunters, in their quest for bison, had moved far enough north to encounter herds of wintering barren ground caribou in the northern forests. At first, small groups of these bison hunters likely hunted the caribou only in the forest and did not follow them on to the tundra unless there were few bison available. As time passed, small groups of these hunters learned more about the ways of the caribou and some began to see caribou as their main food supply. In due course they learned how to live both along the forest edge and on the tundra, and after a few generations their main focus was the caribou herds. At the time, the forest edge was much further north due to the warmer climate. The people had exchanged the bison for the caribou as their main source of food, and for the next 150 generations their descendants followed this northern way of life. Subsequent climatic change would eventually bring them to the Land of the North Wind where they would become the first permanent residents of northern Manitoba.


A
B
HUDSON
BAY
Lake Superior
0 100 200 300 400 500 Km

The first people to permanently live in northernmost Manitoba came from the Northwest Territories. About 3500 years ago, a change in the climate produced colder temperatures and caused disruptions to the way of life in the Territories. The drop in the average temperature killed large expanses of forest and these areas became tundra. The treeline (where the tundra meets the forest) changed from position "A" to position "B" due to this colder climate.

Because of this shift in the treeline, the caribou herds that were the main source of food for these northern hunters changed their migration patterns and the areas in which they lived. Since the caribou lived in the forest during the winter and migrated onto the northern tundra to calve and spend the warmer months, the change in climate meant that they had to travel further south to reach the forest. As well, the caribou likely could not travel as far north as they once had because of the increased distances involved. The pattern of their movement became unpredictable. The colder temperatures caused the caribou herds to produce fewer calves; more of the young died before they reached maturity, and the older animals were weakened or killed by the weather. Overall, the size of the herds was reduced.

The sum of these changes in climate and in caribou migration patterns and herd size caused the way of life of the people of the tundra to become uncertain and they moved southward into the forest. The way of life that had been intimately tied to the ways of the caribou for one hundred generations changed: the forest in which the people normally only spent the winter became a year-round home. Over the next few generations, these First People of the northern forest learned to make a successful living in this environment. Their dependence on the caribou was lessened because of the availability of forest animals, and they became the Forest Dwellers -- the first peoples who were to live in the northernmost reaches of what is now Manitoba.

As time passed, grandsons and great-grandsons of these first residents of the North added their own stories of the moose hunt to those told by the elders about the caribou around the evening fire. Over the succeeding generations, as the people learned more about the forest and what it offered, they became fully at home. The people eventually stopped heading out of the forest in the early spring to follow the annual call of the caribou migration. Because they had learned the ways of the forest animals, that trip was no longer necessary; instead, they stayed in the forest year round. The tundra to the North became the subject of memory and legend.

If the people lived in areas where no caribou visited, they could still rely on other animals to fill their needs. The land was rich in berries, fish, birds, and a host of other species that could be used in many ways. These people became the first year-round residents of northern Manitoba -- the Forest Dwellers -- some 150 generations ago.

As they came to learn about, and better understand, this new environment and the plants and animals it contained, the people modified their technology. In a land of trees, heavy woodworking tools were needed. The stones required for making these tools were to be found in the eskers and end moraines over which the people travelled from one area to another. During the summer, these stones were found and brought back to camp. Sometimes an uncle would take along his nephew to teach him how to make these tools. The youngster would also be taught the ways of the animals which shared the land with the people. If he had learned his craft well, combining his knowledge of the animals with the ability to make tools with which to kill them, a feast was prepared from the product of the boy's first hunt -- even if it were only a small bird or rabbit. Sharing the hunt with others was also an important lesson to learn. Later he would be given greater respect when, because of his efforts, a moose was brought to camp.

Other skills and tools had to be developed when the people came to the Land of the North Wind. Because the snow was soft and powdery, snowshoes were invented and birch bark, found in greater abundance than further north, was a source of basket-making and lodge construction material. In a thick forest, land travel was difficult in the summer, but the waters provided routes through the countryside, and watercraft were developed to fill this need. Possibly, stone axes and adzes were first used to make rafts or dugout craft. Later, the qualities of the waterproof birchbark, the roots of the pine tree, resin from the black and white spruce, and the supple, light-weight, decay-resistant wood of the cedar were combined to produce the birchbark canoe. In due course, occupants of these unique and versatile craft were to explore the vast expanses of the North. On the frozen lakes and rivers of winter, meat-laden toboggans were pulled from the killsite to the camp.

For generation after generation the Forest Dwellers, descendants of the First People, resided in the Land of the North Wind. Small bands of hunters and their families lived throughout the area sharing their skills, companionship and the proceeds of the hunt. Separating into small family groups in the winter, the people gathered again in the spring to mourn the passing of loved ones, welcome the newborn, and see young adults marry and form a new tent within the circle. Feasts were prepared and songs giving thanks to the Creator were sung while the beat of drums provided rhythm to dancing feet.

However, times were not always easy. Occasionally, in the spring, the gaunt survivors of a small group would stumble into a camp, more dead than alive. Their winter hunting grounds had proven to be poor in game, perhaps because of some unwise act of disrespect toward the spirit of a slain animal. Respect for all life within Nature's realm and for the rules of one's group had to be shown. It was felt that a person was never alone: that spirits shared the land with the people. Some spirits were willing to help the hunter's spear find its mark. Other spirits could be malevolent and dangerous, bringing misfortune and sickness to those who strayed from the proper path of conduct.

Each hunter shared his life with a personal guardian which had come to him in a vision when, as a young man, he had fasted alone in the forest. Protection from evil and sickness could be found in medicine from the land, and through prayer and giving offerings to the Creator. Sometimes it was necessary for one who could communicate with the spirits on the group's behalf to ask for relief from hunger, or to interpret signs. If game were not available, it was believed that the animals must somehow have been offended. Offerings were made to the animal spirits in the hope of ending their anger and bringing the game back.

As time went on, the population sometimes grew beyond the capacity of the land to support it and some of the people departed, moving southward and eastward into what is now Ontario. Along the way they met other groups whose forebears had left even earlier, but with whom they still shared similar ways of life. Although these groups populated areas far removed from the Land of the North Wind, some of their descendants later returned with new ideas, customs and knowledge which they had obtained through contact with yet other peoples who lived still further to the south and east.

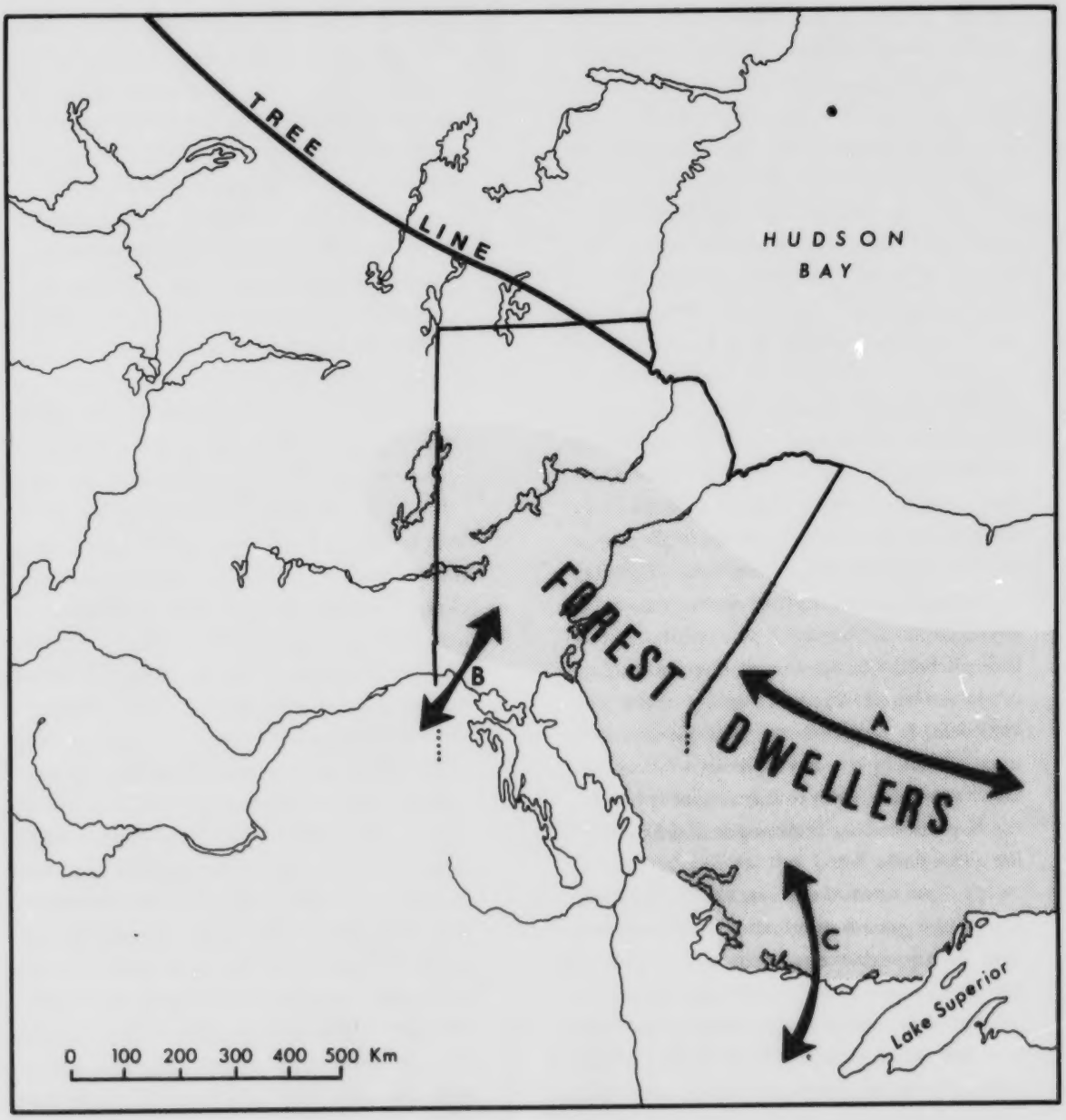
From season to season and generation to generation, in an ever-continuing cycle, the people prospered or suffered, depending on circumstances of climate, resources and their personal abilities to deal with the challenges and opportunities Nature placed before them. In consideration of their adaptation to Manitoba's North and adjacent territories, they can properly be considered the distant ancestors of the peoples known today as the Western Woods Cree.

THE NORTHERN STRANGERS

The Early Arrivals

About 500 years before the First People began their southward movement into the forest to avoid the worsening climate, another group of travellers began an eastward migration from Alaska. Their journey culminated in their descendants' arrival on the coast of the Central Arctic where the saltwater sea was frozen for much of the year, where no trees grew and where it was dark for months at a time.

Considering the land from which they came and the way in which they lived, one would think that these Northern Strangers might have been related to the Inuit. But this is not the case; the Northern Strangers and the Inuit are at best only distantly related peoples who lived thousands of years apart. The few items and structures that have been found in the area around Churchill represent only an occasional visit to northern Manitoba by the Inuit prior to the coming of European traders to the shores of Hudson Bay. The


TREE
LINE
HUDSON
BAY
FOREST
DWELLERS
A
B
C
Lake Superior
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After the First People moved southward into northern Manitoba and became accustomed to their life in the forest, they became Forest Dwellers. The land was rich in resources, and over the succeeding generations the population grew. Some of the members of this expanding population moved further southward and eastward and eventually, much of the forested areas of northern Manitoba and northwestern Ontario were populated, albeit sparsely, with their descendants (shaded area). It is possible that, as time went on, movement occurred in both directions as groups moved back and forth (A). Groups of these related hunters eventually occupied the vast area of the Canadian Shield.

Along the southwest margins of the boreal forest of Manitoba, groups of plains hunters also entered the forest on occasion and joined the Forest Dwellers. Likely, some groups left the forest as well, moving to the southwest onto the plains to adapt to a way of life focused on the great bison herds (B). To the west of the Great Lakes there was also the occasional exchange of people from the coniferous forest into the southern mixed forest and back (C).

During seasons of open water, the canoe provided the people with their chief means of transportation. The systems of interconnecting waterways, and the portages which joined one system with another, were used by the people to travel, hunt and fish. The canoes were light and dependable, and if damaged by a rock or in a rapids, could be easily repaired from material readily available from the land.

In the early spring, when the sap ran freely, the men cut the bark for canoes from large birch trees using sharp stone knives. Large sections of bark were fitted into a frame which held the pieces together and gave the vessel its shape. Ribs, cut and thinned with stone axes and adzes, were placed in hot water to make them soft and pliable. When shaped and dry, the ribs gave extra strength to the shell of the vessel. Other sections of wood, expertly shaped with stone scrapers and knives, were fashioned into thwarts and gunnels. The entire vessel was then lashed and sewn together with long sections of split spruce root, or "watape". In the illustration, the woman in the lower right hand corner is shown debarking the watape. The holes created by the stitching were filled and made waterproof by placing boiled spruce gum, mixed with wood ash, over the sewn areas.

A completed canoe was the product of many hands. Experienced elders taught the young men the skills of building. Over a few more seasons, with more canoes built under the guidance of uncles and fathers, these youngsters acquired all of the knowledge they needed to construct a stable craft. In turn, these young men passed the skills they learned on to the next generation.

early Inuit, or "Thule" people as they are also known, generally lived far to the north of Manitoba.

The Northern Strangers were originally from the lands where North America and Asia meet. Adapted to the northern way of life, they had lived in the forests of Alaska when they first came to North America. Later, their descendants moved eastwards. With spears, lances, toggling harpoons and bows and arrows, they availed themselves of the rich resources of caribou, fish, migratory birds, musk-ox, whales and seals. It is believed by some that the early Northern Strangers may have been the people who introduced the bow and arrow to North America.

Eventually, two very different ways of life were developed by these Northern Strangers. Some of them remained along the shores of the Arctic Ocean. Hunting seals and other coastal animals, they only ventured inland during the annual caribou migration. Others decided to forego the winter sealing areas along the coast, and began to follow the caribou herds of the interior throughout the year.

The Northern Strangers who followed the caribou learned to spend the winter along the edges of the forests, where the animals spent the cold months. They followed the herds northward onto the tundra in the spring. This way of life was adopted by small groups of these Northern Strangers soon after the First People had abandoned the area about 3500 years ago. The First People had already commenced their journey to northern Manitoba by this time. The similarities between the way of life the First People were abandoning and that which some of the Northern Strangers were beginning to learn is interesting to note.

The groups of Northern Strangers who learned to live on the tundra soon occupied much of the recently-abandoned barren grounds, and for the next 700 years they hunted the caribou as their main source of food. Their former way of life was forgotten as they came to rely on the caribou for their existence. But the caribou resource in this deteriorating environment proved to be an unpredictable one, and it likely failed them repeatedly, much as it had the First People. Eventually, most of the Northern Strangers who attempted to make their living inland on the tundra either moved away or fell victim to the unpredictability of their food resources, and succumbed to starvation. Their inland way of life came to an end.

While these events were occurring in inland areas, the coastal population of Northern Strangers continued to use marine mammals as their main source of food. Eventually, they occupied a large expanse of the Canadian Arctic coast, including portions of the shores of Hudson Bay.

Only a very few localities in northern Manitoba have produced evidence of these Northern Strangers. The main sites occur in the Churchill area, but other small campsites have been located near Shamattawa, on Southern Indian Lake, and at Rock Lake, north of Thompson. The inland sites, away from the coast of Hudson Bay, are the product of fishing and/or caribou hunting activities. Some of the campsites in the Churchill area are also the remnants of caribou hunting camps, but other sites are related to a coastal way of life where seal and other marine animals, rather than caribou, were the main source of food. The marine-oriented campsites may have been produced by groups of former inland caribou hunters who were attracted to the coast by the rich marine resources when inland resources were failing them.

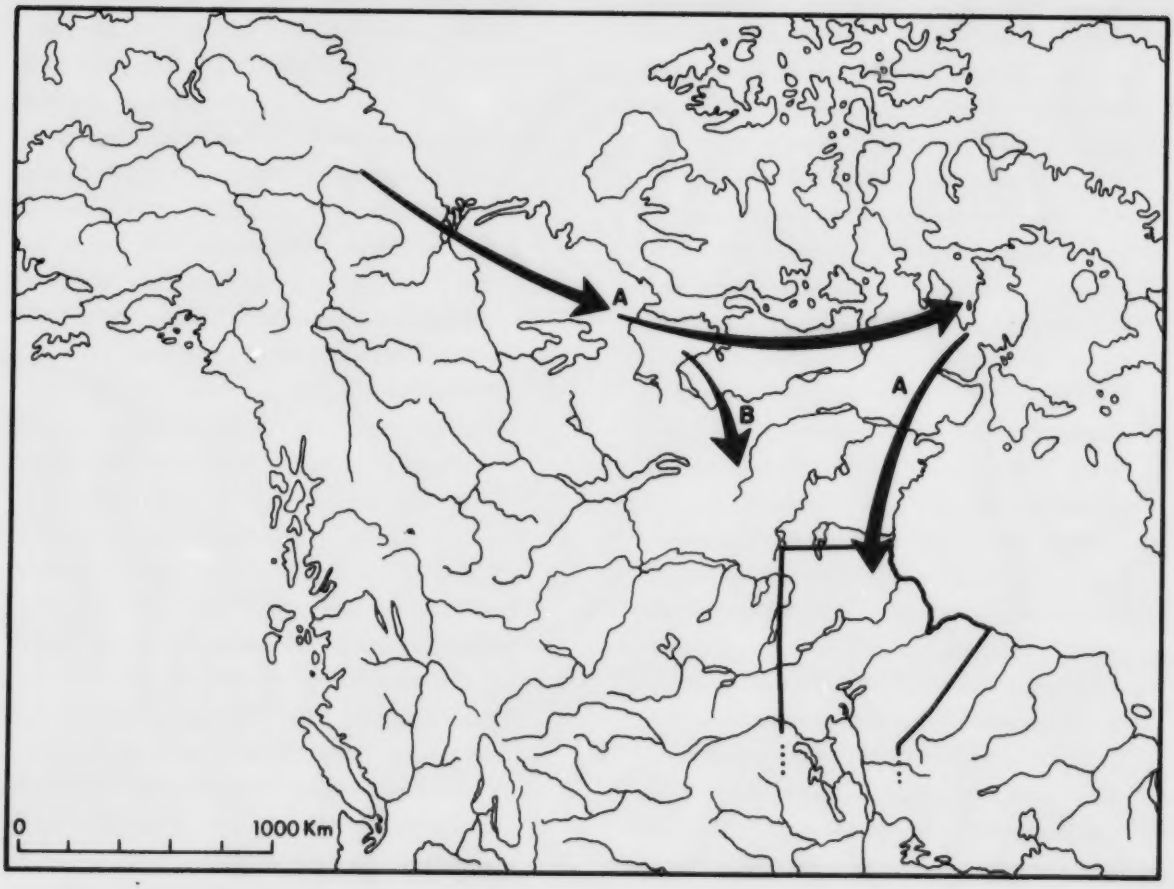
One problem with assigning an inland origin to the people who occupied the coastal sites is that very different technologies are needed to hunt and kill seals on the one hand and caribou on the other. It is possible, therefore, that the coastal sites were occupied by groups of coastal-dwelling people who had moved southward in response to the effects of the deteriorating climate of that time. It is even possible that small groups of inland peoples and coastal dwellers met and joined each other in the vicinity of Churchill. The combination of hunting techniques and skills that each group possessed would have been beneficial to both.

The main coastal settlements of the Northern Strangers occur in the Churchill area because a wide range of food was available and the climate was less severe than it was further north. Wood, a welcome resource, was available nearby to make handles for axes and adzes. Blades were made from the local rocks such as basalt. These instruments were then used to fashion tent poles and drying racks.

Arrow points, knives, scrapers and engraving tools made of flint serve to identify the former camping places of the coastal dwellers. With the exception of those used for heavy woodworking, all of the stone tools which the Northern Strangers made were very small and delicate. It is thought that workable stone may have been a scarce resource in the land they came from, and as a result they may have learned to conserve their supply by fashioning very small tools. It is possible that in Manitoba the Northern Strangers had for the first time an ample supply of both wood and stone, and no longer had to conserve either. It is interesting to note that the woodworking tools, developed in Manitoba where there was an abundance of usable stone, were quite large, although other stone tools continued to be made in the traditional way. Perhaps the coastal dwellers did not wish to take the chance of changing these hunting tools that had worked so well for them in the past.

The coastal-dwellers lived in oval or round skin tents, the edges of which were held down with boulders. They spent part of the year, likely the late winter and summer months, hunting seals and other sea creatures on the coast of Hudson Bay. During the fall and early winter, they travelled to inland rivers to fish and intercept the southward-moving caribou herds. Some of the inland hunts may have taken the people to the edges of the forest, and it was here that they may have found signs of the Forest Dwellers. There is no firm evidence available at this time to suggest that the two groups had any measurable influence on one another, although the heavy woodworking tools the Northern Strangers developed may have been patterned after those made by Forest Dwellers living in the Shield country.

During this time, the coastal area inhabited by the Northern Strangers was changing -- more so than the country situated inland. These changes are more visible when viewed over long periods of time, because in this last area in Manitoba to be released from the weight of the glacier, the land was rising imperceptibly yet more rapidly than it was farther south. First pressed down by the glacier, later covered by the meltwater of the receding ice mass and finally filled with the salty waters of Hudson Bay, the submerged land was rising very slowly from the sea. While it did so, summer storms and winter ice forced sands and gravels against the shoreline, and beach ridges were formed. These relatively flat coastal ridges were high and dry and the


A
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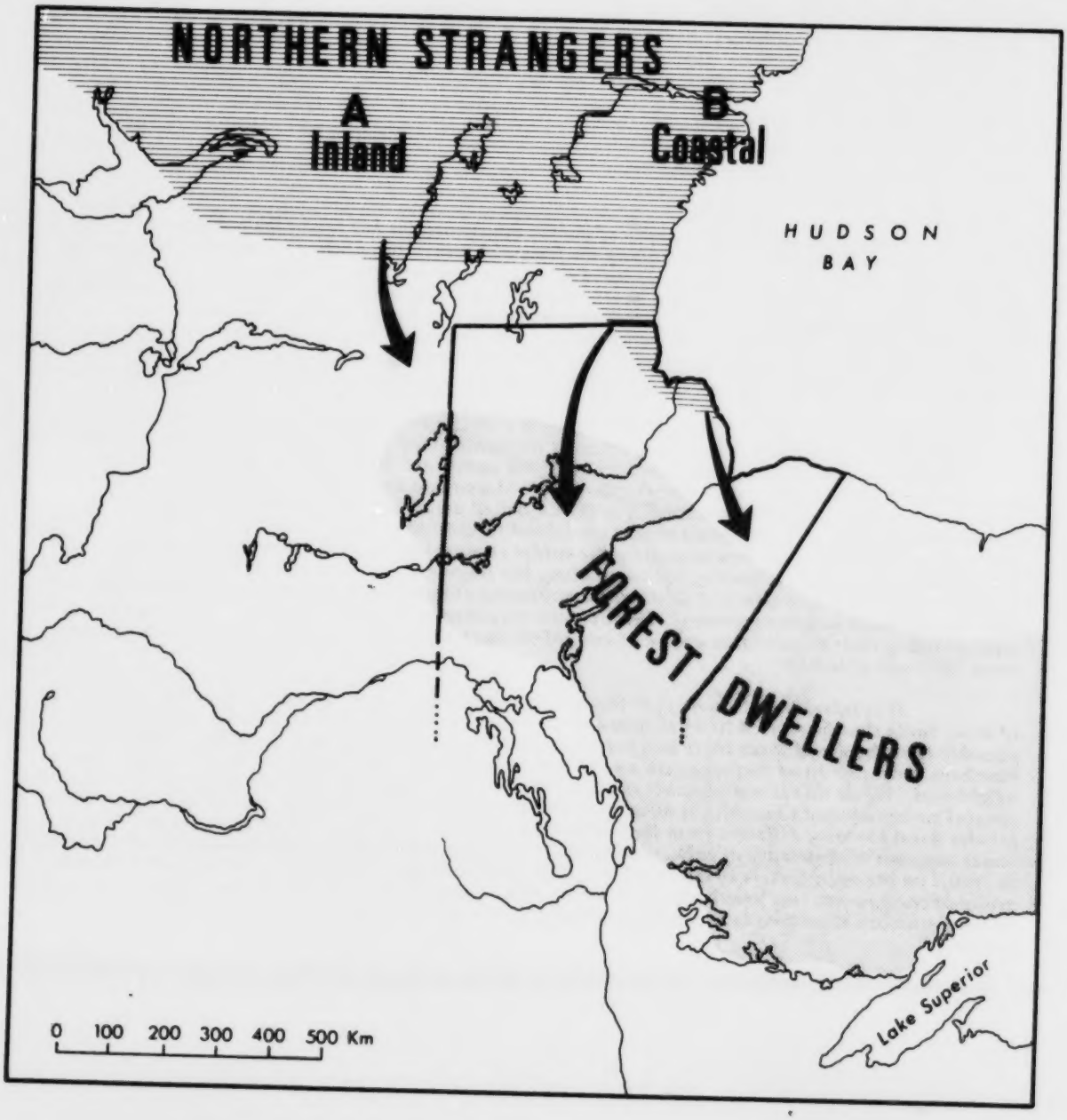
About 4000 years ago, a group of people whose origins lay far to the northwest in Siberia and Alaska made their way eastward along the frozen shores of the Arctic Ocean. Here they hunted whales, seals, walrus and sometimes ventured inland to hunt caribou. Eventually, two groups of these people developed: one remained on the Arctic shore (A), hunting sea mammals and only occasionally venturing inland to stalk the caribou. The other group left the frozen edge of the ocean behind and travelled inland, permanently trusting their fate to the caribou herds with which they shared the land (B). Such a move may have proved fatal for many of their descendants, as the colder climate that soon came to the land reduced the numbers of caribou available, causing most of this inland group to perish.

While the great majority of these people -- both the inlanders and coastal dwellers -- remained well to the north of Manitoba, a few of their camps have been found in the far northern areas of the province. It is uncertain whether some of these camps are those of the inland group or those who had continued to hunt along the shores of the Arctic Ocean and Hudson Bay. Most of the camps that have been found in Manitoba are located in the Churchill area. Some are coastal sites and reflect a sea mammal hunting way of life, while others are inland caribou hunting camps. Perhaps, due to the diminishing numbers of caribou caused by the colder climate of that time, some of the inland groups returned to a sea mammal hunting economy along the coast. It is also possible that the coastal sites in the Churchill area are evidence of southward movement along the coast by groups that had retained their sea mammal hunting economy. These camps may also be a combination of both groups using the area; possibly their descendants even met and joined once again after their forebears had separated some 700 years previous.

It is interesting to note that the coastal sites in the Churchill area contain a unique group of stone tools that were used to work wood, a common resource in the area but rare further north. It is possible that the use of these tools had been learned from people to the south, as the inland group of the Northern Strangers lived further south and would have had an opportunity to meet their southern neighbours. While this is one possible explanation for determining the identity of the occupants of the coastal camps around Churchill, it must be remembered that the technology needed to hunt seals and whales would be very different from that needed for caribou. That the coastal sites are full of seal bones suggests a knowledge of saltwater-oriented hunting techniques and the possession of watercraft to travel on the open waters of Hudson Bay. This kind of technology could not be expected from a group of caribou-hunting people. Further information on the sites occupied by the Northern Strangers of northernmost Manitoba is needed before many questions about their occupations of the area can be answered.


NORTHERN STRANGERS
A
Inland
B
Coastal
HUDSON
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FOREST DWELLERS
Lake Superior
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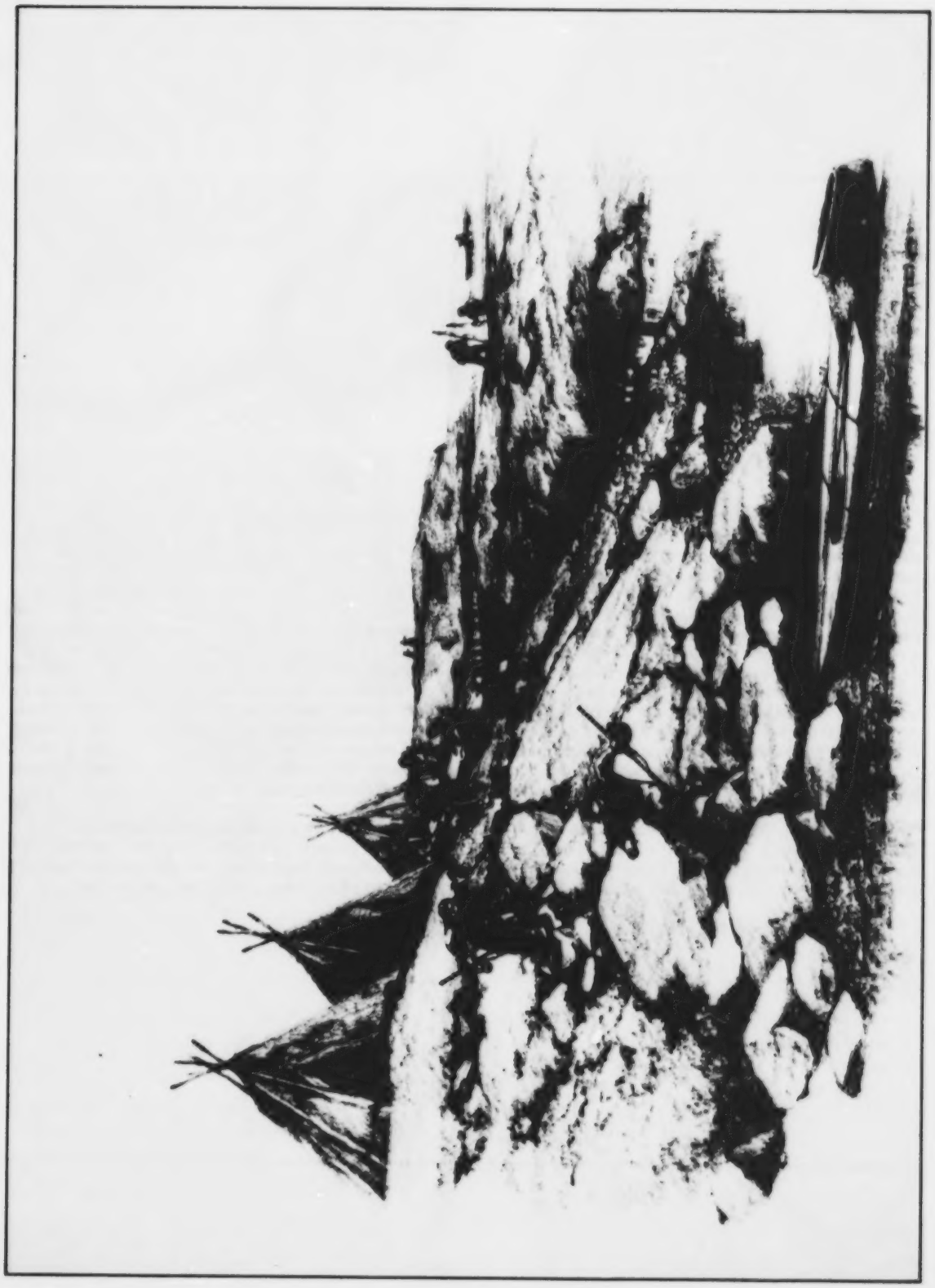
Two major groups of Northern Strangers (the Early Arrivals and the Late Arrivals), adapted to an Arctic environment, have lived in the Land of the North Wind. The Early Arrivals divided into two sub-groups. They came to the area about 3500 years ago and left when climatic conditions worsened about 2900 years ago. Some were caribou hunters, who followed the herds between the forest edge and the barren grounds according to season. These people had abandoned a way of life that had seen them hunt sea mammals during much of the year and venture inland to hunt caribou in the summer months. These people came to northern Manitoba via an inland route (identified as "A" on the map). Only a few campsites left by the Northern Strangers are found in inland areas of Manitoba. Likely, most of these inland people died out as a result of the uncertain hunting conditions caused by a colder climate. Others may have moved to the shore of Hudson Bay and adopted a marine mammal-hunting economy, and survived by learning to hunt seals and other marine creatures as well as the caribou herds during the fall or spring. These former inland people may have been joined along the shore of Hudson Bay by their distant cousins who had continued to hunt along the shores of the Arctic Ocean after they had come to North America from Asia 1000 years earlier. These coastal people had moved southward down the west coast of Hudson Bay (illustrated as "B" on the map).

In Manitoba, the main area inhabited by the Northern Strangers is located around Churchill (the shaded area of Manitoba along the Hudson Bay coast). When hunting conditions became increasingly difficult, these early Arctic hunters abandoned Manitoba and moved northward to find better ice conditions. Their descendants were to return to Manitoba about 800 years later.



In the morning the wind was calm on the Great Bay as the floes of ice coming in with the tide drifted close to shore. It was early summer and the people were living on a small island just off the coast. On the ice around the island, seals basked in the warm morning sun.

The heat from the sun made the seals sleepy and less alert to the dangers around them. This made them easier prey for the white bear, and for the coastal dwellers with harpoons.

The sun dipped below the horizon at this time of year and darkness barely lasted two hours. The hunters rose early and checked their harpoons, lines and sealskin boats before they carried them down to the beach. Soon they slipped silently across the water, their double-ended paddles leaving small circles behind them on the surface of the tidal flow.

The hunters wanted to complete their hunt before the sun had risen too high, heating the land and causing offshore winds to blow. For although the sea was calm for the moment, strong winds could come up suddenly, causing great waves to form. The coastal dwellers hunted their quarry on the south side of the island, for this area was in the lee of the prevailing northwest winds.

A short while later the hunters returned with two seals. Other hunters had been successful as well. Ducks, seals and a young white whale were brought up the beach to be cleaned and prepared by the women of the group. The next few days would be a time of plenty.

After a short rest in their round sealskin tents, which were built on the cobble beach and held down with large rocks, the hunters and their families joined together in a rich meal made from the product of the day's hunt. Later, the sounds of stone hitting stone could be heard as new tools were made to replace those lost in the hunt. The seal skins were stretched, and the last of the interior fat and skin was removed with bone scrapers. Skilled hands soon turned these hides into warm parkas, watertight boots, sections of new boats and many other useful items.

With a store of food in the camp, a short journey to the mainland was planned. The group was running low on wood and needed to replenish their supply so that more harpoons, arrows and boat parts could be made. Living close to the forest, they had become accustomed to using wood in much greater quantities than had any of their ancestors. Inventors developed new tools with which to convert the wood into items they needed. It was also hoped that perhaps, during the trip, they would find a small stray herd of caribou ...

As children played games that copied the tasks of their parents, the sun once again dipped below the horizon along the saltwater coast of the Land of the North Wind.

people camped on them -- near the water and close to their prey. As the land continued to rise, a series of parallel beach ridges formed along Manitoba's northern sea coast. As a result, the camps of the Northern Strangers formerly situated at the water's edge are now found well inland, or on high ridges above present water levels. Even today, the land continues to rise from beneath the Bay, and the same forces of Nature are still at work.

In some areas, the ocean floor was uneven and islands formed offshore as the land rose from the waters of the Bay. Because today the land continues to emerge from the sea, what once were islands are now higher areas found either inland or along the coast. Some of the camps left by the Northern Strangers are found on these former islands, and this evidence helps archaeologists better understand how the coastal dwellers lived and obtained food. If they lived on an island during the summer, hunting seals and other animals, they would have needed some form of watercraft. The wood resources and the hides of the animals they killed provided the material to make such vessels. In the fall or early winter, they left the islands and travelled inland to seek the caribou herds that were then moving southward to the forests. Later in the winter, the people returned to the coast to hunt seals at breathing holes in the sea ice. This would have been their main source of food throughout the long sub-arctic winter and spring. In late spring, seals basking on the ice in the warm sun were a favourite quarry. When the sea ice finally melted in the early summer, the hunters once again launched their watercraft and resumed open-water seal hunting by harpooning them on the ice floes of the open bay. Fishing, egg-gathering and bird hunting were important activities during the warmer months.

For more than 500 years, small groups of the Early Northern Strangers intermittently occupied the Churchill region, living on the coast most of the year and travelling inland for caribou with the season. About 3000 years ago, they left the area of northern Manitoba and travelled northward once again. The coastal area of the Land of the North Wind then lay largely abandoned until it was revisited about 800 years later by a small group of their descendants.

The Late Arrivals

A little more than 2000 years ago, another group of people ventured southward down the coast of Hudson Bay into the Land of the North Wind. This second group of Northern Strangers also made their living in a way that was quite similar to that of the Inuit, but once again, it must be noted that they were not related. The Inuit only made their appearance along the coasts of the Arctic Ocean far to the north of Manitoba about 1000 years ago.

This second group of people were descendants of the earlier Northern Strangers, but beginning about 2800 years ago they developed a slightly different culture to that of their forebears. They also made their living by both hunting sea mammals along the coast and by venturing inland to fish and to hunt the caribou herds. They spent their summers in rectangular, skin-covered dwellings dug into the beaches. These people also had watercraft for hunting seals, but their harpoons were an improvement over those used by their ancestors. During the winter, they moved onto the ice and killed seals at their breathing holes. At this time of the year, they lived in snow houses, likely

igloos. There is evidence that this second group of Northern Strangers relied to a greater extent on sea mammals than did their predecessors. Sleds were developed for travel over the rough sea ice.

The bow and arrow was not used very much, and may have been discarded altogether. The main animal that could be taken with the bow and arrow was the caribou, an inland-dwelling animal, and if the people only rarely hunted the caribou, the bow and arrow would have lost its value to them. The fact that harpoon points have been found at some of their more northern camps in association with caribou bones suggests that they were able to kill enough of these animals to satisfy their needs by using harpoons or spears.

In Manitoba, only two places occupied by the Late Northern Strangers have been found. Both of these campsites are near Churchill and are about 2000 years old. Further to the north, large numbers of their camps have been found and it would therefore seem that the Churchill area was on the southern margin of their territory. About 2000 years ago, a people that for generations had fashioned intricate tools and weapons from bone and ivory and succeeded in living in the harsh environment of the North, vanished -- ironically, due to a warming trend in the climate which eventually brought the Inuit to the far North about 1000 years ago. The Northern Strangers disappeared, but legends of "The Giants" still linger in the stories told by the Inuit.

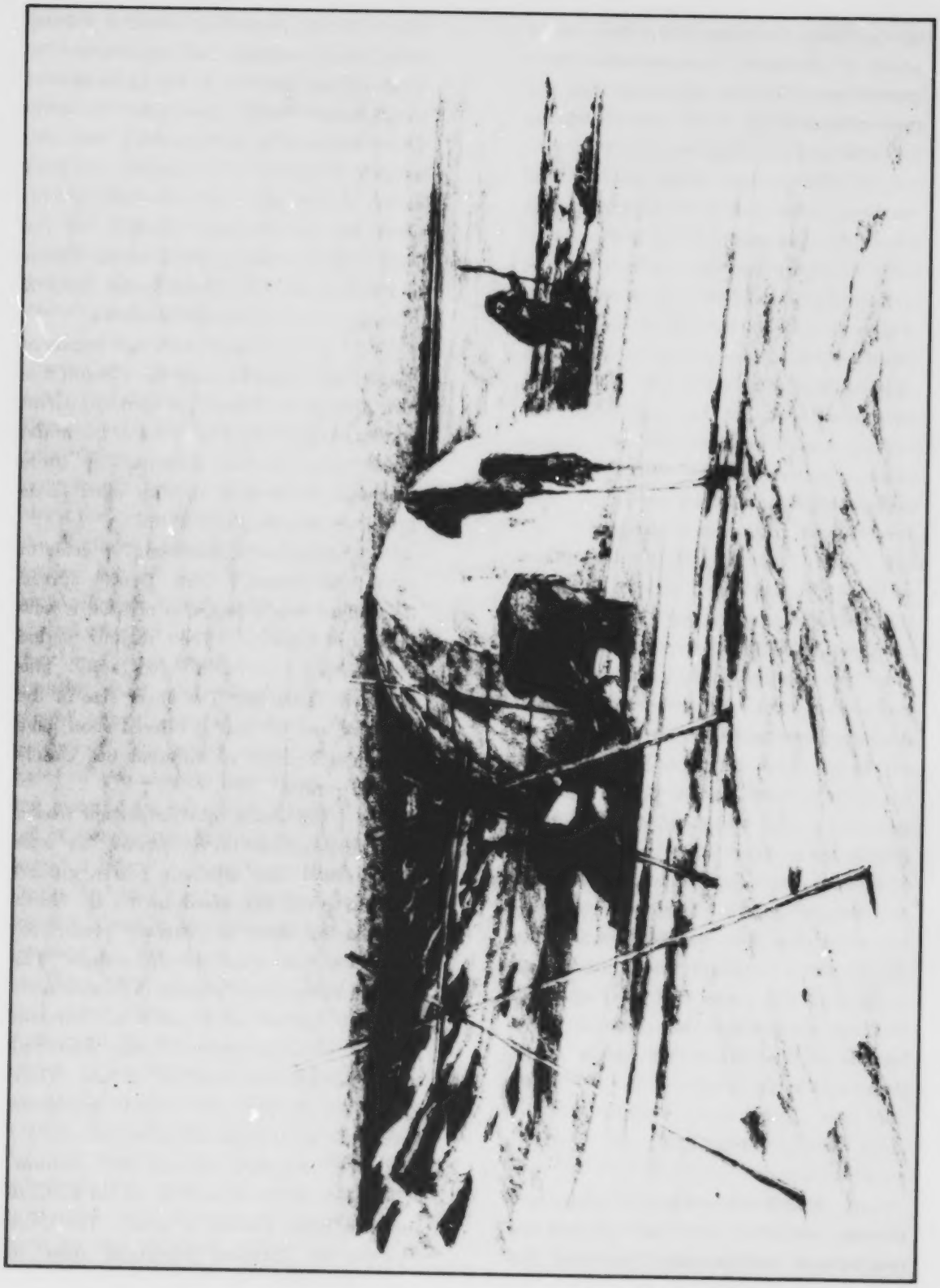
THE DENÉ

A little more than 2000 years ago, distant ancestors of the present-day residents of northernmost Manitoba, the Dené, began to move into the Land of the North Wind. Here they ended a journey which their forebears had begun some 700 years earlier, possibly in the mountains of north-central British Columbia. The early Dené residents of the province were the eastern vanguard of a people who had slowly moved into, and eventually settled, most of the western portions of the Northwest Territories, parts of the Yukon and Alaska, and the northernmost limits of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

As with many other movements of people, this migration may have begun due to a change in climate. A warming trend that had begun about the time of the initial move likely led to decisions by these mountain dwellers to look for other lands better suited to their way of life.

Eventually, following 700 years of slow movement, the Dené spread themselves over a vast area of what is now northern Canada. The region varied considerably in both geography and available resources. The sheer size of the territory and all that it offered soon gave rise to a number of different but closely related groups.

The single most important reason for these separate developments lay with the caribou. The immense barren ground caribou herds that lived in the far North and moved about in generally predictable ways also occupied specific ranges. The people learned how regular the movements of these animals were, and soon, different groups of people became closely identified with a particular herd of caribou. Over time, the people who became associated with the various herds developed slightly different language dialects and customs. The heirs of this somewhat varied heritage are the Dené Nation of today. The Dené people of northern Manitoba refer to



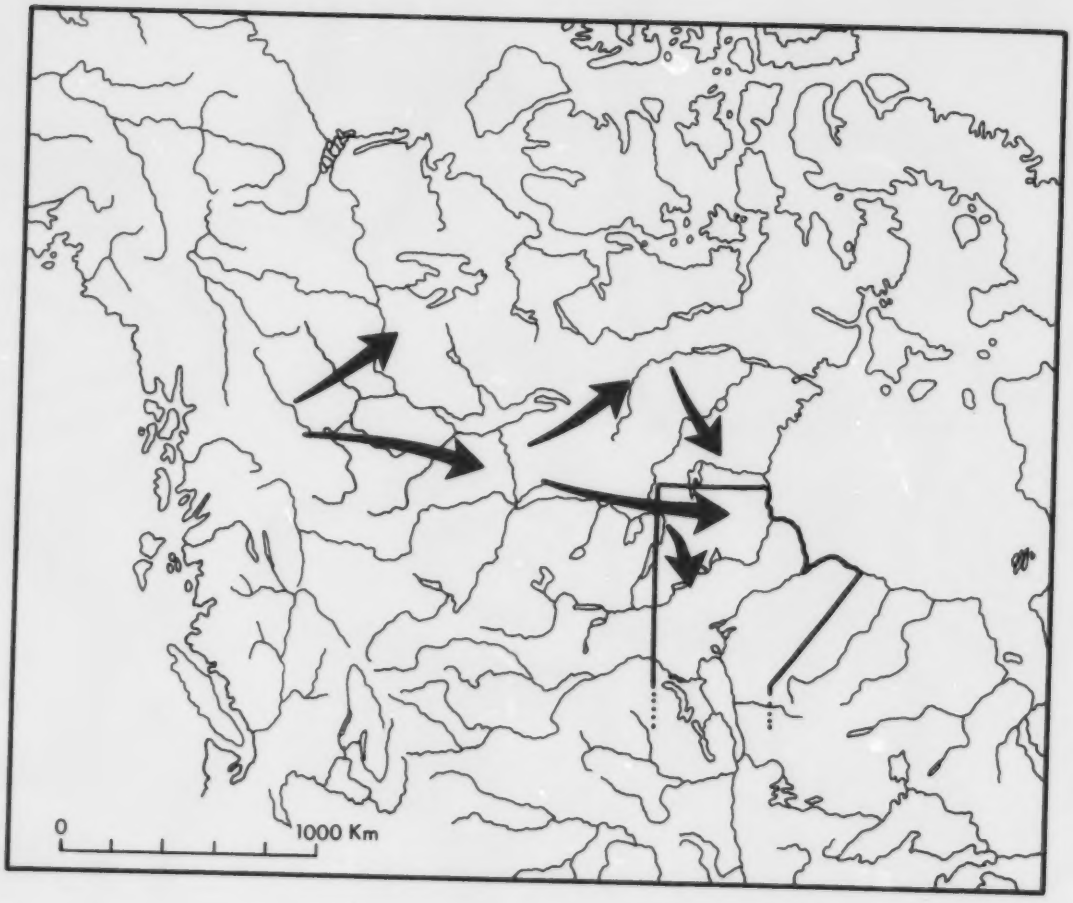
Although the temperature was bitterly cold the air was calm, so the family worked outside again for the first time in many days. The Arctic winds and blowing snows coming off the tundra and the Great Bay had forced the group into the security of their snowhouses during the storm. Fortunately, none of the hunters were out on the ice when the storm had struck. They had seen the signs of the changing weather, and because there was plenty of seal meat in the caches, they had remained close to camp.

In mid-winter, the people lived on or near the ice of the Great Bay. Their main food at this time of the year was seal meat. Standing quiet and motionless on the frozen bay, a hunter may have waited most of a short winter day for a seal to come to its breathing hole. These holes occurred where there was a crack in the ice that was covered with an insulating layer of snow which, even in the frigid temperatures common to this area, allowed the water below to remain open. The slightest noise or movement would betray the hunter and scare the seal to another of its breathing holes, and the wait would have been futile. If his patience was rewarded and a seal came to the hole, the hunter's harpoon-head would plunge deeply into the animal and hold firmly. The struggling animal would be pulled from the hole and killed. The harpoon head would then be removed and the wound plugged with a stick made for this purpose because blood was considered a valuable food not to be wasted. The hunter then dragged the animal back to camp where it would be shared with the group.

The meat was cooked in a soapstone kettle or eaten raw. Stews and soups were also made. The rich seal fat provided energy and warmth to the hunter's family. The hide was converted into clothing and boots by women working by the light of a flickering oil lamp. The shadows of their tough but nimble fingers danced on the wall of the snowhouse.

In the late winter, the people moved inland to meet the northward-moving herds of caribou. The families remained there until the caribou passed, and then they returned to the coast of the Great Bay. Here they remained until fall when they once again moved inland to greet the herds on their southward journey.

Only two camps of the people, who lived in the Central Arctic for more than a thousand years, are so far known to exist in the Land of the North Wind. Much of the story of where they came from, how they made a living, and where they went after their stay in the Churchill district remains to be told.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About 2700 years ago, the distant ancestors of the Dené people began a journey which eventually saw some of their descendants come to the Land of the North Wind. It was likely that a climatic change caused the beginnings of this migration from the mountains of north-central British Columbia. A warming trend disrupted the people's way of life, and caused them to look elsewhere for a place to live.

The northward and eastward movements of the people brought them to the edge of the forest where, in the winter, large herds of caribou could provide them with an abundance of food. Several different caribou herds lived in the North, and soon, small groups of Dené hunters and their families began to follow the various herds. Since the herds seldom met or came close together, these groups of people became separated from each other. The herds travelled through different areas of this vast northern landscape, encountering a wide range of resources and a variety of climatic conditions and environments. Soon, this variation caused the Dené groups which followed the various herds to develop slightly different ways of doing things. Eventually, each group developed different language dialects and customs. The heirs of this somewhat differentiated heritage are the Dené Nation of today.

By about 2000 years ago, the first Dené came to the Land of the North Wind. Here, they followed the Kaminuriak herd from its wintering ground in the forest to the calving grounds of the tundra. Year after year and generation after generation, the caribou supplied the Dené hunters of northern Manitoba with food, clothing and shelter. The way of life of the people was centered around the caribou and their seasonal movements. Today the lifeway of the Dené of northern Manitoba and the caribou remain intertwined.

themselves as the "Edthen-eldili- Dené", or Caribou-eater Dené. Many outsiders know them as the Chipewyan.

Although there is no evidence that northern Manitoba was inhabited when the Dené first arrived, it had been previously occupied by inland groups of the Northern Strangers. Those people had, a few centuries before, abandoned the area and perhaps moved toward the coast of Hudson Bay. The Northern Strangers had always been few in number, but their long-abandoned camps may have occasionally been found by the Dené when they first arrived in the Land of the North Wind.

The first groups of the Dené which came to the North were small bands of hunters and their families. It is possible that, in the beginning, these groups did not remain in any one area; they may have occupied the northern part of the province only seasonally before moving elsewhere for the rest of the year. However, as time passed, more groups were attracted to the rich resources of the land and the population grew. What had been for the first Dené a new land became familiar country, and as their knowledge grew and the population expanded, so did the amount of time they spent in the region. A fuller understanding of the land allowed them to hunt more successfully and, because of this success, the population also increased.

In northern Manitoba, the caribou herd that the Chipewyan hunt today is called "Kaminuriak", a modern Inuit term. This herd migrates through northern Manitoba during the winter, and travels northward into the Northwest Territories to calve in the spring. The herd returns to northern Manitoba in the late fall and early winter of the year. Though the animals are fewer in number today than they were in the past, the sound of muffled hoofs walking through snow and mosses and the breathing of thousands of animals still cut through quiet winter mornings in the Land of the North Wind. In the past, such sounds announced the approach of the herd. One can imagine the excitement and anticipation of the early Dené when the herd was first sighted.

The people were generally able to predict when the herd would come and go and where the animals might be found at any given time. Places where caribou regularly crossed narrow water bodies or travelled along eskers became important campsites for the people. After preparing for the hunt, it was there that they waited for the herd. The people hunted together as a group and shared the rewards of their work. In this way, all had food and none would go without.

Caribou were speared in the water from hide-covered boats or from birchbark canoes, and then brought ashore and butchered. Large quantities of meat were dried, smoked and stored for the long winter ahead.

The caribou were also herded into pounds. People working together frightened large numbers of animals toward a corridor where women and children, waving hides, forced the animals into an ever-narrowing laneway. In some places, if there were only a few people in the camp, hides waving in the wind to resemble people were used along the edges of the laneway. The apparent opening at the end, toward which the herd ran, turned out to be a trap of logs and brush from which there was no escape. Some of the animals caught their antlers in hide nooses tied to the logs. Spears and arrows also found their mark.

In the mid-winter months, small groups of hunters tracked caribou and returned from the chase laden with meat. Feasts of caribou meat were eaten in villages of tents made from their hides, and as the people gave thanks to the Creator, they danced to the beat of a drum also made largely from caribou hide.

Without the caribou, the people's survival would have been difficult. Although the people also ate fish, hunted other animals and collected many different kinds of plants and roots, it was the caribou, in the long run, that sustained them. The herd not only supplied the people with meat but it also satisfied many of their other needs as well. In addition to hides for their tents and for clothing and footwear, the caribou also provided bone and antler for tools, sinew for thread, and a host of other items. The caribou was not simply a means of supporting life for the people -- it was the way of life, and the spectre of starvation faced those who failed to find the herd.

When the Dené came to Manitoba, the treeline was located south of its present position -- a response to cold climatic conditions. Since they wintered along the northern fringe of the trees and ventured northward into the tundra in summer, the area they occupied during the coldest parts of the year was also further south during this cold climatic phase. The Dené lived as far south as Southern Indian Lake, and for about 1000 years this lake was part of their territory. Even further to the south were the Forest Dwellers, slowly evolving the culture now known as Cree. The Southern Indian Lake area and the country near the Churchill River was on occasion used by both groups. It is unclear if these areas were used at the same time, at differing seasons, or whether the two peoples frequently met during their stays there.

About 1000 years ago, a short warming trend occurred which caused the treeline to shift northward. In order to live where the forest edge meets the tundra, the Dené also moved further north to continue their traditional way of life. When the climate later cooled and the treeline again shifted to the south, the Dené attempted to move southward once again. On their return, however, they found their former lands were now populated by the Cree, which effectively ended Dené use of these southern portions of their former territory. How often the two groups met or whether or not their meetings were always peaceful is not known. In times of plenty, the land may not have been contested, but in hard times, relations between the two groups may have been strained.

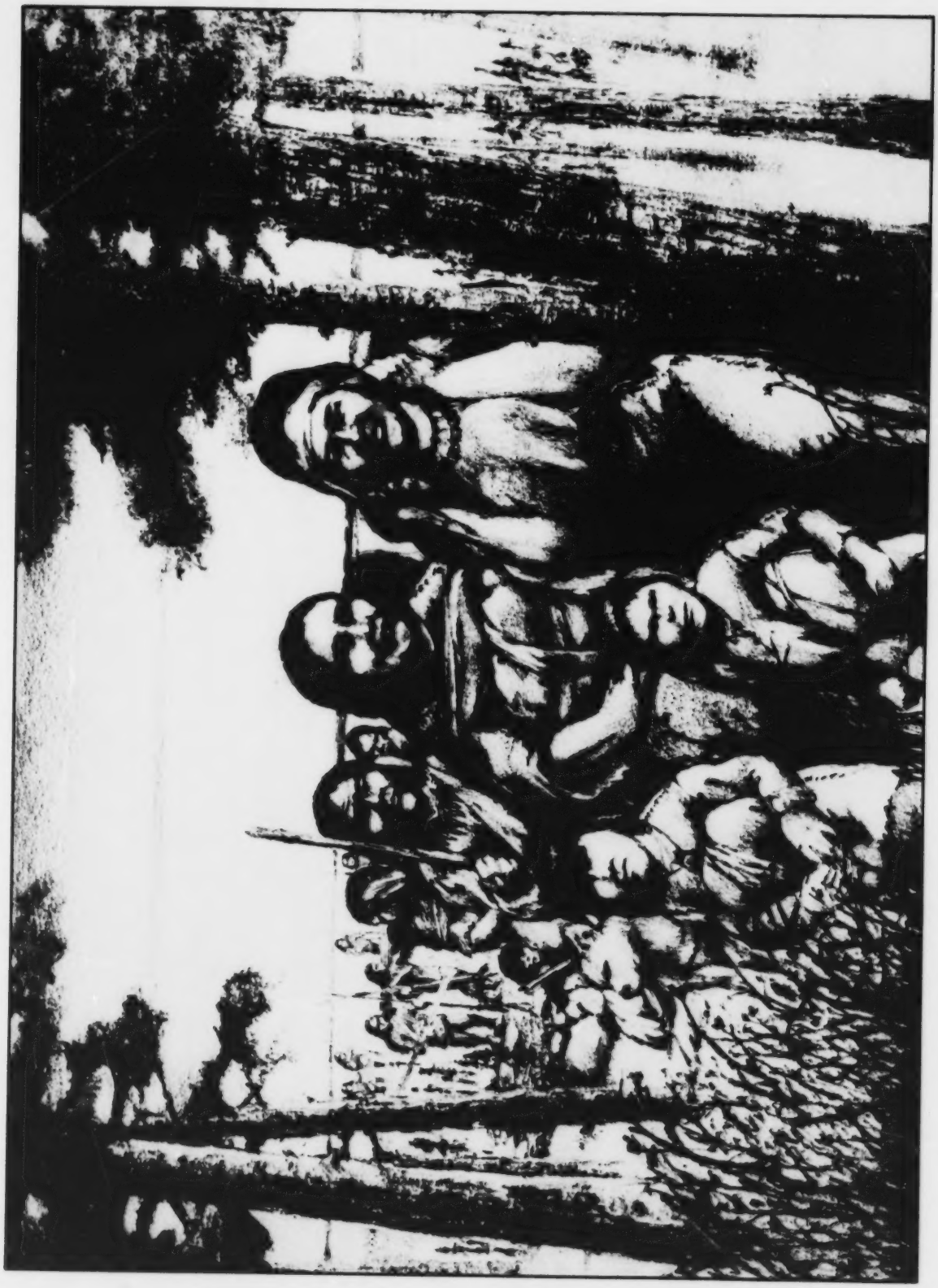
The areas of land used by each group became more or less fixed about 1000 years ago. The areas just north of the Churchill River and Southern Indian Lake remained Dené country; the lake and areas along the river, and all the country to the south of it, were home to the Cree. Some areas such as that surrounding Big Sand Lake and the country between Southern Indian and Reindeer Lakes likely saw use by both groups.

Although the extent of their lands has changed, the Dené have hunted in the northern areas of Manitoba for the past 2000 years and have continued to rely heavily on the caribou for their source of livelihood. For close to 100 generations, the northernmost Land of the North Wind has sustained the Dené and shared its bounty with them. And during all that time, the people remained steadfast in their traditions. Theirs was a long-standing, stable adaptation which had not demanded much alteration over the centuries. It is a good example of a culture in close harmony with its environment.

Earlier, the Dené hunters had seen the telltale signs of the large herd from a great distance. On cold windless spring mornings, when the herds were travelling north to their calving grounds, steam could be seen rising above them. Later in the day, a light breeze blew across the land as the hunters walked towards the herd. Since the men were down-wind, they could smell the animals even before they were in sight. Coming close, the muffled sounds of thousands of hooves could be heard flattening the tundra mosses as the herd moved slowly northward on their annual journey.

Spears brought down a few of the animals, leaving the rest to continue. Enough meat to fill the group's needs for a few days was brought back to camp as the sun set on the lengthening spring day.

The caribou continued to pass by for the next while and finally disappeared from view. When meat was needed again, the hunters found another herd. On the way back to the camp, the men talked about moving northward as well because most of the herd had already left the forests to the south and had migrated further onto the barrenlands. Soon, only a few isolated animals were left in this area near the edge of the trees. If the group was to have an easy summer, it would have to move to where caribou were to be found. In preparation for this journey, they began to repair their summer equipment as soon as they returned to their families.



With the coming of late spring the people began their move northward once again. Such movement was necessary if they were to remain close to the caribou herds, their major source of food. The Dené remained camped in a small cluster of stunted trees, far out on the tundra, for a few weeks. The caribou herds moving northward to the calving grounds passed nearby, and from these herds the people took the animals they needed. When most of the animals had passed by, the group then moved on to another camp, even further north.

When abandoning the old camp, the people took with them only the tools, hides and utensils they would need in the summer camp. Other items, which could be replaced, were left behind. These items may have been recovered at a later date, or left to become part of the tundra.

While on the trail, the men carried only their spears and bows and arrows, leaving them free to hunt as the group travelled northwards. The women and children carried the rest of the baggage and supplies needed at the next camp. When the people arrived there, remnants of earlier use of the area were found.

Wood was a scarce resource in the tundra, and the people preferred treed areas when they could find them. Stunted willows and shrubs provided the only firewood on the open tundra, and since much effort was required to gather this material, the people lived in open areas only when their journey took them north of the last clusters of stunted trees.

Camp could be made quickly, because the hides and poles for the people's tents were carried with them. Soon a warm fire blazed near the lodges. Caribou meat, from an animal killed by the men while on the journey, was roasted and shared by the families. A nearby lake provided fish to vary the diet. Berries were added to meals of roast caribou, boiled fish, ducks and geese killed by hunters on their travels across the landscape.

Camp would be moved a few times during the summer. But when the cold Arctic winds began to blow sleet and snow across the barrens and the caribou began their southward journey, the people were close behind.

In mid-summer, the Dené lived far out on the open tundra. The caribou moved into this area to calve in the spring, and remained there until the first cold days of fall heralded a move towards the south once again. The people followed these migrations, because they were dependent upon the caribou for food.

During the short summer, the people lived near lakes where fresh water was available and where they could fish for part of their food supply. The Dené only had a few canoes with them since they walked on their way northward, carrying all their household items and tools they needed on their backs. The canoes were used to cross the icy rivers and lakes on the journey. At the summer camp, the canoes were also used to lift fishing nets and to search for the herds. Caribou always remained the prime source of food for the people. The herds were everywhere at this time of the year and therefore a continuous supply of fresh meat was available. Some of the meat was smoked and dried over willow fires for use on the hunt, or when travelling from one camp to another.

The caribou-hide tents were used to help keep away the hordes of mosquitoes, black flies and other biting insects that tormented the inhabitants of the land during the short summer. At other times, cold winds and low clouds, carrying rain or even snow, swept across the area and forced the people into their shelters. Summer nights lasted only a short time in the far north, and sunrise replaced dusk.

The stay on the tundra was a short one. Soon, frigid winds again brought snows and falling temperatures. The caribou began once more to move southward towards the distant trees, with the people following. This cycle of movement with the herds was repeated for almost one hundred generations by the Dené of the Land of the North Wind.

In the late fall, the vast caribou herds of the Land of the North Wind left the open tundra and began their southward journey toward the forest, where they spent the winter.

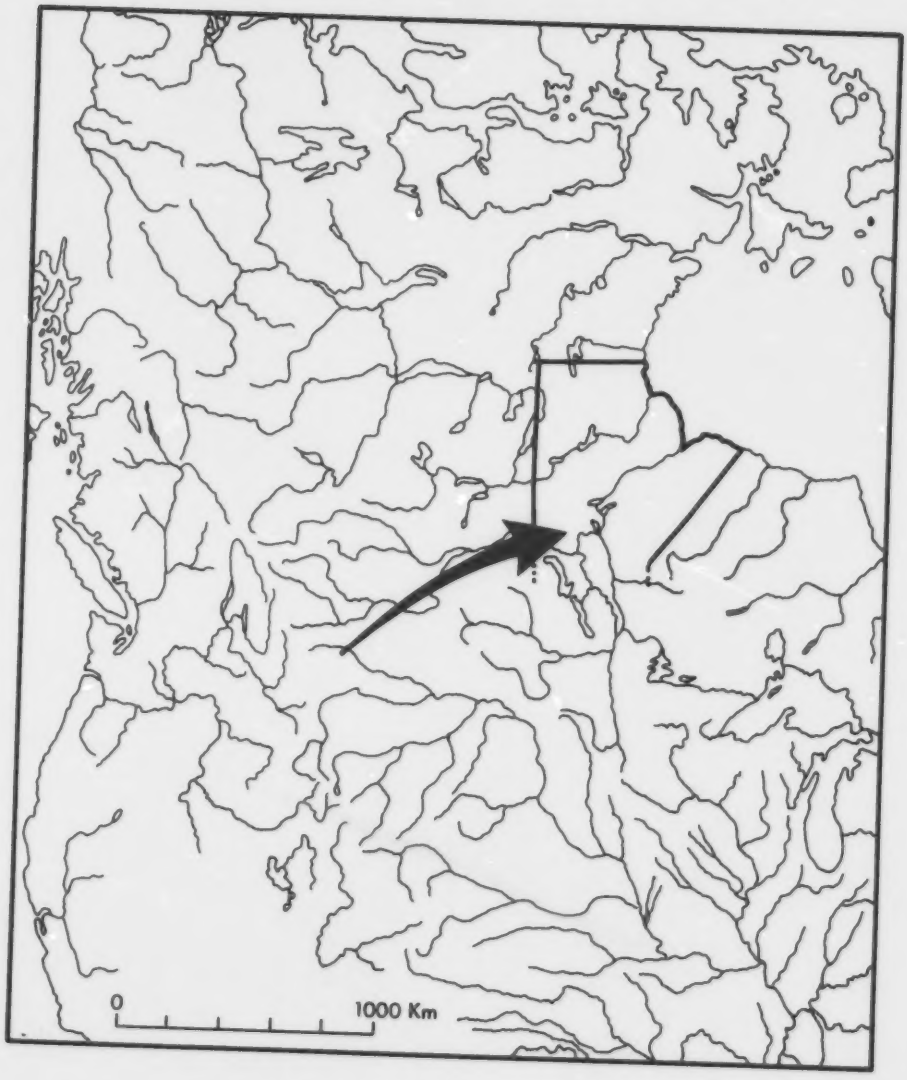
Tens of thousands of these animals crossed the barrenland, eventually coming into the first stunted trees of the northernmost areas of Manitoba. They crossed rivers and lakes on this move southward; and as the first snows of winter began to fall and the ice formed on the northern waters, they came to the forest.

Along these routes, the Dené waited at places where the caribou regularly crossed rivers or lakes. Here some of the herd was killed, to be used as food for the people. The caribou hides were made into warm winter clothing, and some of the bones of the animals were fashioned into tools to be used for work around the camps.

Later in the winter, when the herds were deep in the forest, the hunters built a fence of sticks, branches and roots to form a pound into which small herds could be driven. These pounds are usually located on the edge of a lake. With loud yells and the waving of hides, the people chased the caribou onto the lake ice towards the entrance of the pound. The animals were driven into an ever-narrowing corridor towards the pound. The entrance, into which the caribou rushed, seemed to be a safe and open escape; but it was a trap from which there was no exit.

Along the edges of the pound the hunters, armed with spears and bows and arrows, waited for the herd. Some of the caribou caught their antlers in loops of rawhide tied to the logs. As other animals stampeded by, spears and arrows found their marks. In this way, enough meat to fill the needs of the people for several weeks was taken in a single day. It required considerable knowledge of the ways of the caribou, and the organization and skills of the entire group, for such a hunt to be successful. The skills and knowledge needed to achieve this organization were learned as succeeding generations of Dené hunters lived in the North.

After such a hunt, when large amounts of meat had been obtained, the people enjoyed considerable leisure time. Then the Dené could eat, tell stories about events in their past and about earlier hunts and deeds, or sing songs and play the hand game to the rhythm of the hand drum. The caribou hides were made into clothing and shelter by the women of the group. The meat not used immediately was frozen, to be roasted at a later date over a roaring fire. With large caches of meat stored on racks outside of their dwellings, the people were secure through the bitterly cold winters of the northernmost areas of the Land of the North Wind.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Between the grasslands of the south and the coniferous forest of the North lies a zone of mixed forest. In the past, this transitional forest was displaced northward or southward depending on the climate of the times. A warmer climate saw the grasslands and mixed forest expand northwards, while during cooler climatic periods the opposite occurred. Such changes did not happen quickly but were the result of long-term climatic shifts.

Between 5000 and 3000 years ago, groups of hunters from the southern grasslands came into the southern forest edge in the Saskatchewan River and The Pas area. These people were bison hunters who likely wintered in the forest to be near the bison herds.

While their main quarry would have been the bison, their campsites on the plains have shown that these people were hunters and gatherers capable of utilizing a wide range of food resources. During times of drought, which frequently occurred during this period, the food resources of the forest may have proved to be more reliable than those of the plains. The rich resources of fish, moose, migratory birds and a host of other animal and plant resources drew people to the area.

If their stay proved to be an extended one due to adverse climatic conditions on the plains, these groups became familiar with the resources of the forest and experts at utilizing its rich bounty. Some may have returned to the plains when conditions improved, but others remained in the forest and became a forest-dwelling people. While most of their campsites were in the Grand Rapids-Saskatchewan River-The Pas area, later generations of these small groups occasionally moved further into the forest. Tools and other items left by people whose ancestors originally lived on the western plains have been found deep in the heart of the northern forest. It is likely that individuals from these small groups met and married into communities of Forest Dwellers, and were eventually absorbed into the resident population.

TRAVELLERS FROM THE WEST

In the areas around The Pas, between Cedar Lake and Lake Winnipegosis, and on towards Grand Rapids, groups of people occasionally arrived from the west. In this southwestern portion of the Land of the North Wind, the record pertaining to the early period of 3500 years ago is quite different than it is to the north and to the east. The ancestors of these people had, for thousands of years, lived on the Great Plains to the south and west. They were bison hunters who relied principally on this animal for their way of life. What caused them to leave the plains and enter a forest that would have been unfamiliar to them, and which contained animals that were notably different from those they were used to hunting? Once again, climatic change is part of the answer.

Since the end of the Ice Age, the grasslands and parklands of southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba have been occasionally struck by severe drought. The aspen parklands and the deciduous forests that lie between the plains and the boreal forest shifted to the north and to the east in response to these warmer conditions. Grassland occurred in areas that had formerly been forest, and the forest edge was positioned further north and east. The drought conditions also seriously disrupted the bison herds that lived on the plains during the summer and moved into the aspen forests for the winter (the similarity between these seasonal bison movements in the south from grasslands to wooded areas and the movements of the caribou herds of the north from the open tundra into the edge of the boreal forest is interesting to note).

If the herds failed to arrive, the people living along the forest edge had two choices: return to the plains in search of the bison, or remain in the forest and hunt other kinds of large game such as moose and woodland caribou. For those choosing the latter, year-round life in the forest could prove to be an attractive option: with the arrival of spring, the fish began their spawning runs up the rivers that flowed into Lake Winnipeg. Grand Rapids, located at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River, has long been known as an excellent fishing spot; in fact, the earliest evidence of fishing, represented by bone harpoons, dates to between 5000 and 3000 years ago. The southern edges of the northern forest, with its rivers and lakes teeming with fish and waterfowl, provided an attractive alternative to the severe drought that every so often descended upon the plains to the south and west.

In due course, the drought conditions gave way to a more moderate climate. It is possible that some of the people left the forest and moved westwards onto the plains, the land of their forebears. There, with the previous drought conditions long since ended, they were able to turn to the bison for food and in so doing became part of the annual cycle of the plains. Some people, however, stayed in the area with which they were familiar, while others ventured even further into the forest to hunt for themselves and their families. A few of their campsites have been found deep in the forest, far to the north and east of the areas in which their forebears first lived when they came to Manitoba. The groups or families that remained in the forest were eventually absorbed into the larger resident population of the region -- the Forest Dwellers.

TIMES OF INNOVATION

Introduction

About 2000 years ago, winds of change began to blow through Manitoba from the south and the southeast with the coming of several important innovations. These changes, and the peoples associated with them, did not extend their influence into the area all at once, nor are they to be equated with only one group. There were many players in the story which, during a thousand-year period, influenced the lives of the northern people in a host of ways.

As was previously discussed, groups of Forest Dwellers occasionally moved out of their ancestral lands to follow paths that led away from the North. Some of these groups moved south and east through the rocky Shield country towards the Great Lakes. There they followed a similar way of life, in a similar environment, to that of their relatives who had remained in the North. These migrants met and eventually merged with other groups who lived in this new homeland -- people whose lives were also supported by hunting, fishing, and the harvesting of wild plants. Being farther south now, the Forest Dwellers also came in contact with yet other peoples whose ways were rather different.

For example, pottery-making was one item of technology that quickly spread throughout the Great Lakes area, Minnesota, northern Ontario, and into Manitoba. It was probably introduced into the North by women from southern regions who married into northern groups and brought the technology with them. The idea was well-received by the local women, as the ceramic pots were especially useful in cooking food over an open fire. The vessels were made of coils of clay placed one on top of the other until the desired shape was obtained. The vessels were then smoothed, decorated and fired in an open flame. As the idea spread further afield and became well established throughout the North, the local women added their own unique forms of decoration.

The pots were fragile and easily broken if dropped. Remnants of them which have been found at ancient campsites have given much of the information about the people who made them. Unlike ideas, pottery is tangible; and even if broken and discarded, it provides clues to the exchange of ideas and customs between different peoples.

Another major technological innovation that was quickly adopted by the hunters of the forest dwelling-groups was the bow and arrow. Previously, hunting had been done entirely with spears and lances. As is the case with many early inventions, it is difficult to know whether the bow and arrow was invented only once and then spread far and wide from its place of origin, or whether it was invented several times over by different peoples in different parts of the world. It is also very difficult to determine its possible "route of entry" into northern Manitoba. It is generally believed that the bow and arrow was initially introduced from the south. However, it could just as easily have been made known to the Forest Dwellers by the early Northern Strangers during their occasional forays southward into the boreal forest; perhaps future research will bear this out. At any rate, the bow and arrow and the distinctive stone arrow points that were attached to them were being used in northern Manitoba as early as 2000 years ago, if not before.

The introduction of innovations such as pottery and the bow and arrow were added to an already successful forest-oriented way of life in northern

Manitoba. The people were not changed to any great extent by these innovations, since their way of life continued to be basically similar to that which had existed before. People continued to hunt and fish and to collect edible plants, adding those ideas and technical changes that proved to be more efficient in obtaining food, and that were suited to the environment in which they lived. New customs, such as the use of fish nets, offered more efficient methods of obtaining food and allowed their populations to increase.

"Laurel" Pottery

Two types of pottery that had originated in the southeast eventually made their appearance in northern Manitoba. The first, called "Laurel", was distinctive by virtue of its coconut shape and its decoration which was applied by pressing the edge of a comb-like object into the soft clay. Laurel pottery was developed about 2500 years ago in the Upper Midwest of the United States. From there, it spread westwards and northwards throughout the forested areas of northern Ontario, Minnesota and on into Manitoba. Within 500 years, this type of pottery was being made in the Land of the North Wind. Although pottery probably came to the North mainly by way of group migration, it is likely that in some instances the idea alone was transferred from group to group and eventually added to the way of life of the Forest Dwellers. Either way, it was made in northern Manitoba for the next thousand years.

"Blackduck" Pottery

About 1200 years ago, a second group of pottery-makers added their story to the history of Manitoba. The pottery they made is known as "Blackduck" ware. These people originally had inhabited the southern edge of the boreal forest of the central Great Lakes region. They lived by hunting and gathering, and followed a way of life similar to that of other forest groups. They were likely forced to move out of their homeland by southern agriculturalists who, because of population increases, began to press northwards. A warming trend may also have caused the forest to "retreat" northwards, allowing the agriculturalists to expand their territories.

Forced ever westwards and eventually arriving in southern Manitoba, the makers of Blackduck pottery were attracted to the great herds of bison that roamed the grasslands. The Blackduck people hunted the bison and followed its seasonal movements onto the open plains during summer and into the sheltered woods of the aspen parkland during the winter. In the course of their winter hunts, the Blackduck people met families and bands of northern hunters who had moved south with the season to hunt the bison. During these meetings, some of the southern groups may have joined the northerners and later moved with them into the Shield country, instead of following the herds back out on the grasslands. Another possibility is that some women married into the northern groups, and when they returned north the women took with them their way of making pottery. At the very least, ideas including new ways of making pottery were exchanged.

Blackduck pottery was characterized by a round body and various combinations of decorative oblique and horizontal lines and circular indentations, or "punctates", distributed around the neck of the vessel. It is easily distinguished from the more slender, pointed-bottomed Laurel ware. Blackduck pottery is especially

common in the Grand Rapids and Saskatchewan River areas. As one goes further north, the campsites in which this pottery is found become fewer. Several such camps have been found along the Burntwood River and on Southern Indian and Big Sand lakes; others are located east of the north end of Lake Winnipeg. The few places in the Land of the North Wind containing Blackduck pottery likely indicate that, if groups of these people who made this pottery had moved into the North, they quickly merged with, and became part of, the resident population. This resident population -- the Forest Dwellers -- had seen their numbers augmented earlier by the Laurel pottery-makers as well.

"Clearwater Lake" Pottery

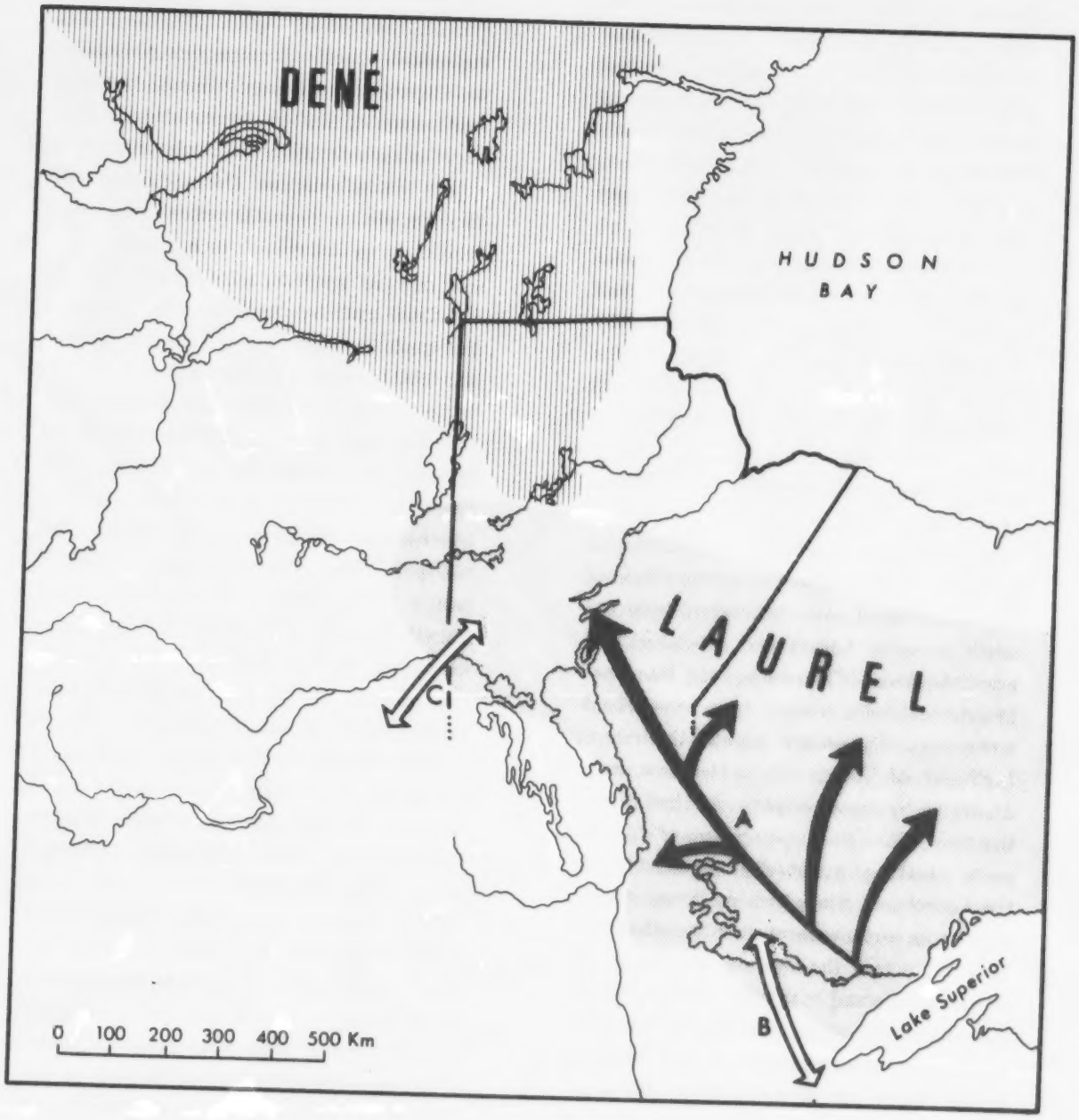
Yet a third style of pottery made its appearance in the North about 1200 years ago with little if any direct input from elsewhere. That is, its style was developed in northern Manitoba, rather than having been introduced into the region from the south as were Laurel and Blackduck. It bears the name "Clearwater Lake Punctate" by virtue of its having been discovered archaeologically on the lake of that name northeast of The Pas, and because it is decorated by a row of punctates just below the rim. This final expression of Native pottery-making eventually replaced both the Laurel and Blackduck as it was likely seen as an improvement over the others. It is found across the north-central areas of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and eastwards into the northwestern portions of Ontario. For a thousand years, it was made and used by the Cree to cook and store food and carry water. Unique forms of this pottery, in the shape of plates, were developed locally, and have been discovered on Southern Indian and Big Sand lakes. These particular vessels may have been used as lamps, although it is not certain if this is actually the case.

THE CREE

During the 3500-year period that people have lived in the North, a rich expression of human achievement developed from their knowledge and understanding of the environment. The way in which their cultures developed reflect this adaptation. Descendants of the First People, the Forest Dwellers, and others who came as individuals or in small groups and merged with the resident populations, the Cree and their culture at the time of European contact were the culmination of this 3500 years of northern history.

The bands of Cree hunters and their families who occupied the Land of the North Wind before European contact all shared a basically similar way of life. However, in areas where a certain resource was particularly abundant, the local people would have relied more on that resource than did other groups living elsewhere. For example, while fish were exploited throughout the North, barren ground caribou were especially important in the northernmost areas during the winter. But no matter what the resources, the main aspects of Cree life were quite similar throughout the areas of northern Manitoba in which the people lived.

Traditionally, the Cree were hunters and gatherers. The rich resources of fish, available throughout the year in most areas of the North, were of great importance and may have been the major food source from the very arrival of the First People. Fish are of course associated with lakes and river systems, and it is possible that for this and other reasons the way of life of the Cree revolved around the


DENÉ
HUDSON BAY
LAUREL
C
A
B
Lake Superior
0 100 200 300 400 500 Km

Pottery first came to Manitoba via the southern edges of the boreal forest (A). The Forest Dwellers' distant cousins living near the western end of the Great Lakes were involved in trade with their southern neighbours (B). These southern people had begun to make pottery after the idea had come to them from even further south.

About 2500 years ago, a type of pottery was being made at the head of the Great Lakes that was similar in the method of manufacture to that being made to the south, but which possessed its own unique forms of decoration. Soon this "Laurel" ceramic ware was being made as far west as Manitoba. It is not completely certain how this early pottery came to the province; the westward movement of groups of pottery-makers, the transmission of the idea of pottery-making from group to group, and the intermarriage of pottery and non-pottery-making people, all likely had a role to play.

Eventually, Laurel pottery-making came to the Land of the North Wind. The method by which it came to the North is also uncertain, but all three of the above-mentioned factors likely form a part of this story. Nor is Laurel pottery as common in the North as it is in the southeastern parts of Manitoba. A few campsites containing it have been located as far north as Southern Indian Lake, along the Rat and Burntwood River system, and in the area of the Saskatchewan River well into Saskatchewan, with a scattering of other sites in between. This scarcity of sites likely means that the Laurel population in northern Manitoba was always quite small.

Forms of pottery from the plains southwest of The Pas area are related to Laurel. Their development likely came about due to connections between makers of Laurel pottery and peoples who lived on the plains (C). These plains pottery forms illustrate how ideas and innovations developed and moved across the continent.

Laurel pottery was made in northern Manitoba for about 1000 years following its introduction to the region around the time of Christ.

When this woman, a maker of Laurel pottery, arrived in the North as a bride, her new people -- the Forest Dwellers -- did not know how to make pottery. In that first spring, when she gathered the clay and mixed it with grit and water, and started to roll out the coils for the first clay vessel to be made in the Land of the North Wind, a group of the local women gathered around her to watch.

There were questioning looks on the faces of some of the women as the thin "ropes" of wet clay were looped around, one on top of the other, and the pot gradually took shape. How could this wet mud carry water or be placed on a fire and used to boil a stew? Were the stories told by this southern woman about the usefulness of pottery to be believed?

The pot was smoothed on both the interior and exterior surfaces. The places where the coils joined disappeared during the finishing process, and only those areas near the top of the vessel which she decorated with a sharp stick, were not smooth to the touch. On the inside, the stick created small bumps of clay by being partially pushed into the rim from the outside. She used her fingers to prevent the decorating tool from being completely pushed through the clay. Her fingerprints remained on these raised areas.

After the pot slowly dried and the moisture in the clay evaporated, she piled quick-burning sticks around the vessel and started a fire to bake it rock-hard. The people watched and waited. The amount of time and work involved in making pottery was considerable and the result had to be good to convince them it was worthwhile.

Finally, after the fire burned away and everything cooled, she picked up her pot, walked down to the lake, washed it out, and brought back a drink for everyone. They looked it over carefully as they drank and continued to watch as she boiled a fish stew in the pot. This method of cooking was much easier than placing heated rocks in a birchbark container in order to boil a stew. There were fewer ashes, and there was no grit from the rocks left in the stew.

Pottery-making proved to be a useful skill, and soon all of the women in the group were trying to fashion similar vessels. She helped them learn the process, and, as an able teacher, her knowledge was quickly passed along to the other members of her group.

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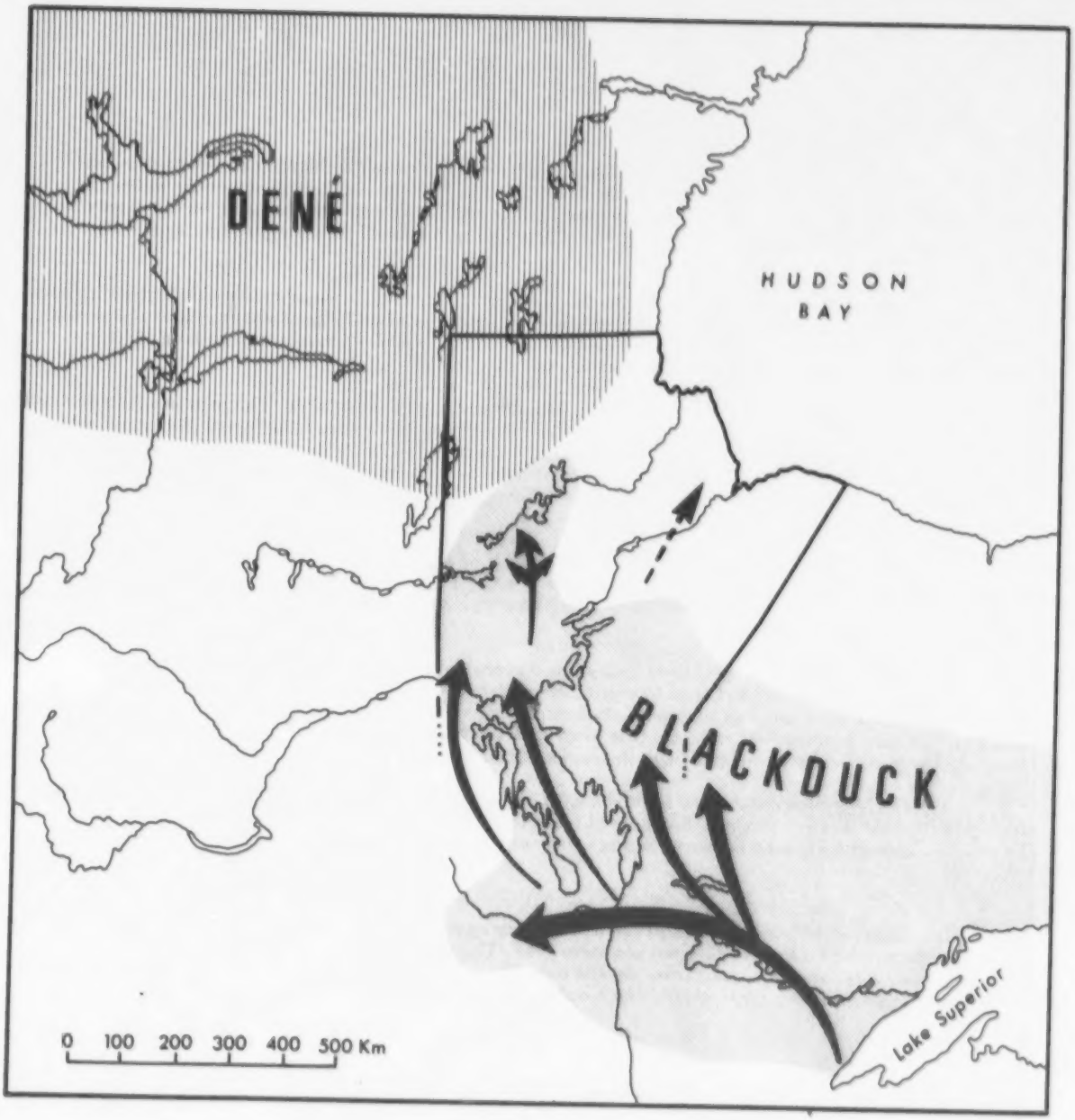
These events had all happened a long time ago, at a time when she was little older than the granddaughter who had made this pot she now held. The girl had learned quickly; the vessel was well fired and sound. It was decorated exactly the way the first vessel to be made in the Land of the North Wind had been so many years before. The teacher, her grandmother, was satisfied.


DENÉ
HUDSON
BAY
BLACKDUCK
Lake Superior
0 100 200 300 400 500 Km

About 1200 years ago, people from the central Great Lakes region began a westward journey which eventually brought some of them to the Land of the North Wind. These people were hunters and gatherers who had lived in the mixed wood forests of that area. A warming trend had caused the edge of the forest to "retreat" northwards, to be replaced by grasslands and a parkland environment. As the grasslands shifted northward, farming people from the south began to move northward as well.

These two groups of people knew each other from past trading activities. The northern Forest Dwellers had traded furs and other commodities available in the North for agricultural products and ceremonial items from the south. Customs and ideas were also exchanged when this trading took place. Many ideas about religious belief and technological innovation had found their way northward into the camps of these forest people as a by-product of these trading activities.

A new method of pottery-making was one of the technical innovations that came from the south. Rather than building the clay vessel up by using coils of moist clay, slabs of clay were joined together to build the pot. This method produced much thinner vessels than did the previous way of making pottery. The innovation was seen as an improvement and it quickly became the standard method of manufacture used by the people of the forest.

The northward pressure being exerted by the agriculturalists, who had a larger population, and the diminished hunting opportunities due to the changing environment, soon forced these southern forest people out of their homeland. They began to move northward and westward. When the people came to the edge of the forest in southern Manitoba, they saw the great bison herds, and this animal quickly became their main food source. The people wintered in the parkland and from there followed the bison out onto the great prairies and plains to the south in the spring.

While in their winter camps in the parkland, some of these makers of Blackduck pottery came in contact with groups of northerners who were also in the area hunting bison. It is likely that, on occasion, members of one group would remain with the other. During these sojourns, intermarriage likely took place. Some of the southern women from these unions accompanied their husbands northward into the Land of the North Wind. Also, individuals or small groups of southern hunters joined the groups of northerners from time to time. In this way, makers of Blackduck pottery, and the idea of how to make it, came to the North.

More common in the Saskatchewan River area and near Grand Rapids, examples of this kind of pottery are found as far north as Southern Indian Lake. A single fragment from one of these vessels has even been found on the shores of Hudson Bay (broken arrow).

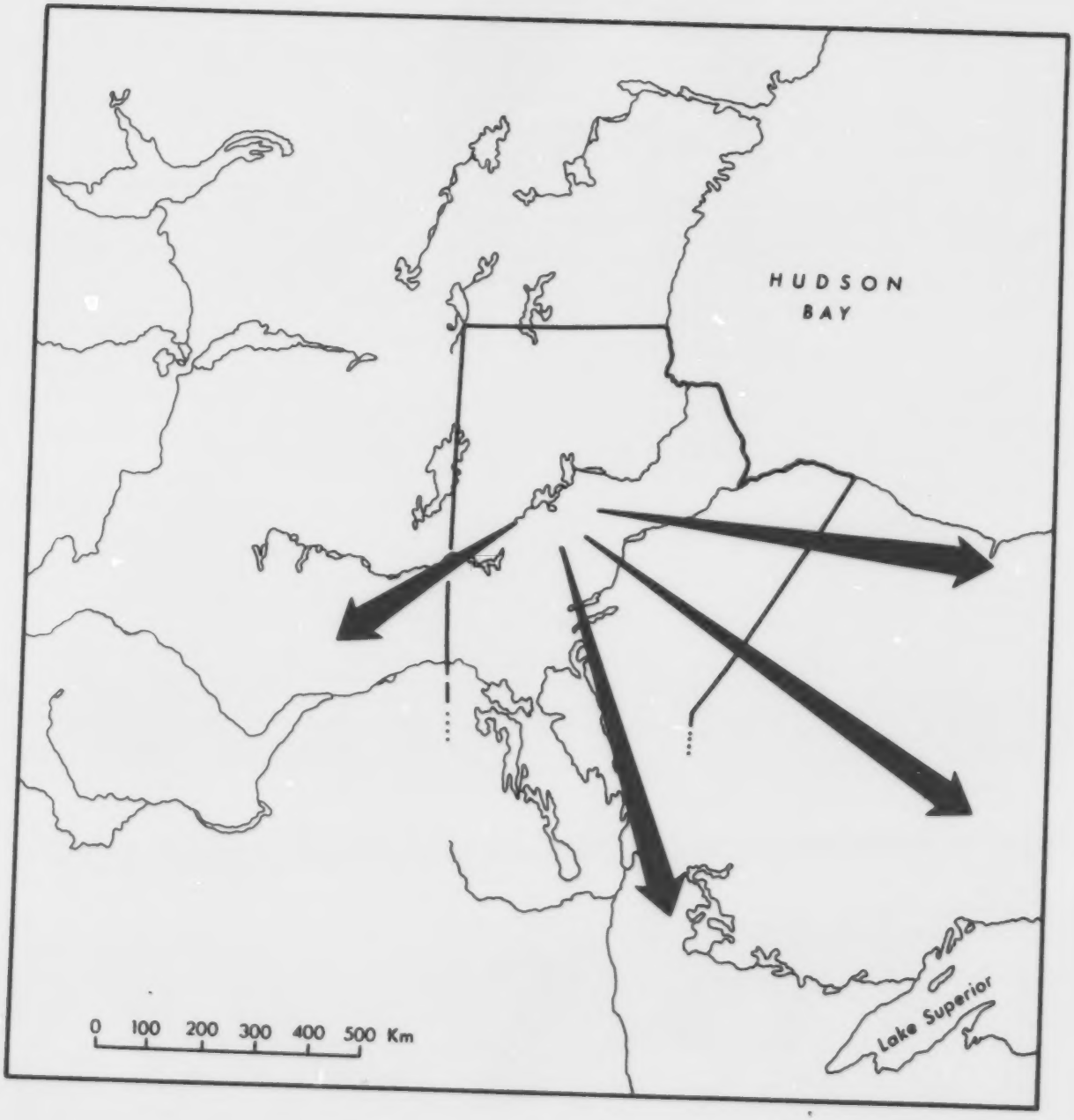
The style of pot this woman holds was first developed in the Great Lakes region, far to the southeast of northern Manitoba. The times in which these early pottery makers lived saw change and disruption. A slight warming of the average temperature in the area caused differences in the environment. The forests in Michigan and Wisconsin in which the "Blackduck" people lived shifted northwards and were replaced by open forests and grassland. Soon, peoples from the south who cultivated plants and who lived in villages began to press northwards into these areas.

Many of the people who made Blackduck pottery moved out of areas that had been their homes for generations. Some went further north while others began a westward journey that eventually brought some of them to southern Manitoba. Here, the great herds of bison that roamed the grasslands during summer and wintered in the parklands became the main prey of these hunters. During the winter months, groups of northern hunters likely moved southward with the coming of cold weather to share in the abundance of bison that lived along the edges of the southern forest. These two groups of peoples met and exchanged ideas on ways of making and doing things.

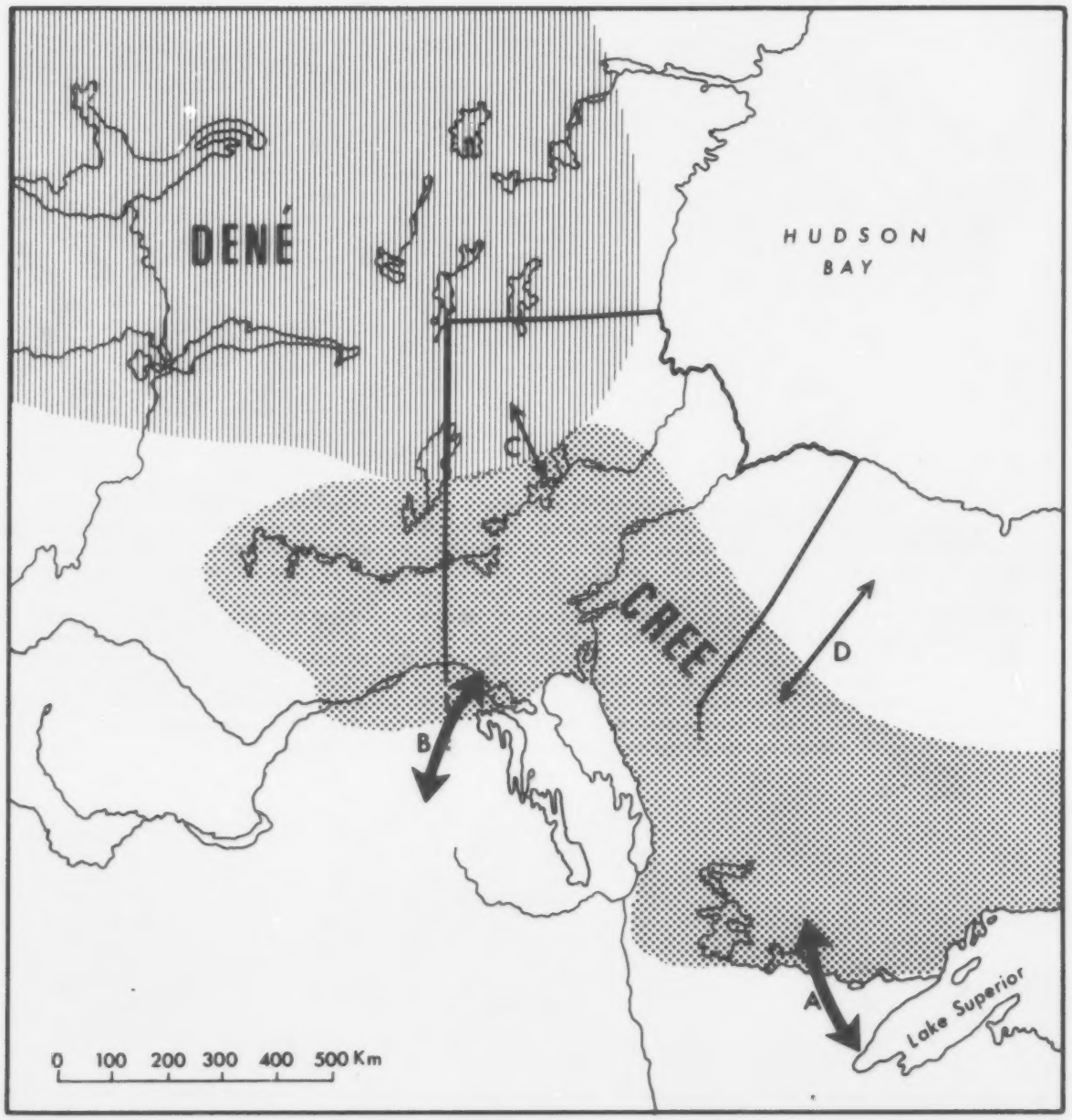
Blackduck pottery was made in a manner different from that being used in the North at this time. Rather than coils of clay being built to form a pot, the clay was worked into a vessel by joining large sections of clay and beating them together by means of a paddle and a supporting rock. The paddle hit the outside of the developing vessel while the rock, held against the inside, acted to brace the action of the paddle. This method of pottery-making was likely seen as an improvement over the previous technique and adopted by some of the northern groups.

Blackduck pottery eventually came to the North through the exchange of ideas, by intermarriage, or by some of the Blackduck people joining northern bands on their return journey into the boreal forest in the spring. Most of the Blackduck pottery known in northern Manitoba occurs along the Saskatchewan River and in the Grand Rapids area. Other places where this pottery was used have been found along the shores of the lakes that exit from Lake Winnipeg, in camps along the Burntwood River, and still further north on Southern Indian and Big Sand lakes. A single frogment from a Blackduck vessel has also been found on the shore of Hudson Bay.

Although Blackduck pottery is found over a wide area of northern Manitoba, it is not common in most of the region. Perhaps vessels made by the Cree potters who followed were a further refinement on this new method of making clay pots and they quickly supplanted the Blackduck form. It is also possible that those Blackduck people that came to the North merged with and became part of the northern groups, adding their influence to the developing Cree culture.


HUDSON
BAY
0 100 200 300 400 500 Km
Lake Superior

About 1200 years ago, a new form of pottery referred to by archaeologists as "Clearwater Lake Punctate" made its appearance in the Land of the North Wind. Cree women began to manufacture and decorate a type of ceramic ware, variations of which were eventually adopted far to the south, east and west of where it was first made. It is believed that this form of pottery originated in the Southern Indian Lake area of northern Manitoba, and from there it spread into eastern Manitoba, Northern Ontario and up the Churchill River into east-central Saskatchewan. It was also common along the east side of Lake Winnipeg and along the Winnipeg River to Lake of the Woods. The distribution indicates that Cree people, who were in communication with the various groups within their overall cultural area, were living throughout the vast region wherein this style is found. However, its core area of distribution is in northern Manitoba. By virtue of the widespread distribution of their pottery and the long period of time during which it was made (800 years), the Cree made a significant contribution to the history of aboriginal pottery-making in North America.


DENÉ
HUDSON
BAY
CREE
A
B
C
D
Lake Superior
0 100 200 300 400 500 Km

By about 1200 years ago, people identifiable as early Western Woods Cree were firmly established in much of northern Manitoba. Considerable cultural innovation and the movement of ideas and peoples into this area was occurring and continued to occur. Blackduck pottery was introduced from the south, and members of groups who made it also likely moved into the North (A). A direct line of descent, with considerable additions from the southeast and southwest (B), can be traced from the First People, through the Forest Dwellers to the present day Cree residents of northern Manitoba.

Further north, the territories occupied by the Dené and Cree were being defined. Climatic fluctuation, which saw the treeline shift to the north or south depending on the conditions, caused the areas occupied by the two groups to occasionally shift as well (C). During warmer periods, the forest advanced northward and the Dené, if they were to live on the edge of the forest near the tundra, had to move northward. That meant that the Cree were then free to move into the area formerly occupied by the Dené. During colder periods the opposite occurred, and the Dené moved southward with the forest edge, displacing the northernmost Cree groups. From the time of the coming of the Déne, about 2000 years ago, the boundary between forest-dwelling peoples to the south and the Déne to the north fluctuated back and forth roughly along a line that runs through Southern Indian Lake. By 1000 AD, when another warm period saw the Déne move northward once again, the Cree occupied the whole of this lake. The Cree continued to occupy the Southern Indian Lake area even after the next cold period began. Possibly the introduction of the fish net saw the Cree population increase, and this allowed them to remain on the lake. Thus, by 1000 AD the division between the Déne and Cree lands was roughly set and so remained for the next 800 years.

Some Cree movement to the northeast also likely continued to take place from time to time (D).

lakes and rivers of their territory. The dense spruce forests that cover most of their area were not very productive, but the narrow strip of land on the edges of the rivers and lakes and the waters themselves contained a wide variety of resources. Since utilization of the inland areas of the forest would have been quite difficult, and food was plentiful near the water's edge, it is likely that little use was made of upland areas, at least during the warm months.

The animals the Cree hunted also relied on water, and it is probable that much of the time the large game animals could be taken by hunters at the river banks and lakeshores. Beaver, rabbit, muskrat, ducks, geese and a number of other animals were also hunted in these locations.

Areas where recent forest fires had allowed new growth, and which would have attracted a number and variety of animals, were also very important parts of the environment. It is possible that some of these areas were intentionally burned off by the people to ensure that certain resources existed in all areas wherein they lived. For example, the blueberries, raspberries and other plants found in the burned-off areas, while useful in themselves, would also have attracted animals which the people hunted.

Other plants, available in the waters of the shallow bays and rivers, were gathered in season and formed an important source of food. Medicinal plants collected from all areas of the environment helped cure many illnesses and conditions which afflicted the people. Their knowledge of plant cures was passed on from one generation to the next, and added to as time went on.

To be able to survive in an environment as harsh as the North, the people had to develop a wide range of life skills. With these skills came the need to develop and improve upon appropriate tools and technologies. One technology was not sufficient: because each season presented major differences as to how the people lived, there existed the need to develop special tools and skills appropriate to the season.

The spring was a time of re-awakening for the land, and because a sure food supply was available, life was quite easy. The people began to gather together in large camps near streams where vast numbers of spawning fish could be trapped in stone or log weirs which partially blocked the flow of water. The fish could also be caught in fish traps woven from spruce roots, or speared and harpooned.

In these fish camps, people had the opportunity to learn how the winter had been for the other families and what the hunting had been like, and to renew their bonds with friends and kin. Each family group had its own story to tell and all of the tales of the winter experience were eagerly awaited. Sometimes the news was bad: sometimes people came to spring camp hungry, while others may have lost a son or sister to disease or accident. The worst news was no news at all, because it would have meant the family had fallen victim to starvation or a Witigo, a creature that was once a normal human being but which had become possessed by a cannibalistic spirit. When so possessed, ice formed inside the person's body, hair grew in profusion on the face, arms and legs, and the creature developed an insatiable craving for human flesh.

Before break-up, groups of people continued to come across the spring ice into camp to join those already at the fishing grounds. In some places, notably Southern Indian Lake, several hundred people may

have gathered together for the spring and summer months.

Most of the winter goods were left back at the winter camp, cached for the following year. And once at the fish camp, the toboggans, dog sleds and snowshoes which had been used by the people to get to camp were put away along with the thick winter robes, to await the next cold season. Dogs howled as they were tied up for the summer or placed on islands away from the camp. Although the dogs were needed to move through the country during the winter, they could be dangerous and would also steal food from any unattended rack if given the opportunity.

The people had brought with them items they needed for summer work. Bundles of birch bark which had been stripped one warm day as the sap began to run, were unrolled. Some were used to replace and patch the birch bark dwelling the people had left the previous fall. If a new dwelling was needed, stone axes were used to cut down tall, thin spruce or tamarack, and the resulting poles were formed into a tipi-like circle and covered with the waterproof bark. The old poles became firewood.

The women fashioned especially fine birchbark into containers to hold dried meat, fish or other staples. Other fine sheets were reserved for the building of new canoes. Brothers, uncles and nephews worked together to finish such projects in time for open water, the older men showing, by example, how to use the appropriate tools as the vessel took shape. Co-operation and learning to work together were major lessons for all youngsters.

Life was full of the tasks which were necessary if the people were to lead the good life. New bows and arrows had to be made; spears were fashioned and men patiently taught their young kin the craft of making stone tools. At other times, drums beat a rhythm for songs sung to the Creator. Dances were also offered in thanks for the wealth which the land shared with the people.

At the far end of the camp, or completely away from the eyes and ears of women and children, some of the men held ceremonies to ensure a good year. Before any ceremony, water was poured on hot rocks in a sweat lodge. It was believed that the steam purified the celebrants.

Sometimes, the ceremony included a religious leader, or shaman. Well-known for his spiritual knowledge, the shaman was said to have the power to see the future in a vision. Only he knew the circumstances under which the power was received, for to make such information generally known would have caused him to lose his power. He kept to himself the knowledge that a figure from his vision was now painted on the face of a rock located well away from the camp. The painting consisted of powdered ochre or hematite which was mixed with a bonding agent of sturgeon oil. When applied to a granite surface, the paint actually became part of the rock. Such paintings were "guides" to mark points in time that were forseen by the shamans whose function it was to direct people to the right path in life as given by the Creator to the first man to walk the earth. Some of the paintings of animals such as caribou, bison and moose may also have been intended to bring the hunter luck in finding these animals.

The people also had to be concerned with getting food. Every day, large quantities of fish were brought into the camp. While the last of the ice remained in the bays, the catch was transported in skins pulled across the ice. Later, when

Using skills and knowledge adapted and modified in northern Manitoba from ideas first brought to the region centuries before, Cree women of Southern Indian Lake fashioned pottery vessels from clay. The clay had been obtained from a local deposit which had proven to contain the properties needed to make strong, well-fired pots.

The clay was brought back to camp in hide bags. There it was dried, crushed and inspected for any large lumps, roots or other impurities. Pieces of granite that had cracked in the campfire were crushed and added to the powdered clay. This grit made the vessel strong and allowed steam to escape from the clay when the pot was finally fired. Without the rock powder, the pressure of the steam would have built up during the firing, causing the pot to crack or even explode.

Water was added to this mixture of clay and grit. A wooden paddle was used to beat the outside wall of the pot upwards, thinning the vessel in the process. As the paddle was used to beat the clay, the potter held a fist-sized rock against the inside of the pot to prevent it from collapsing.

Soon the wet clay was formed into the size and shape of pot the woman needed. Designs taught to her by her grandmother were added to the vessel as a young daughter looked on, learning skills by imitating her mother's work. The pot was then left to dry. When most of the water had evaporated from the clay, the pot was placed in a large, quick-burning fire and baked rock-hard.

After the fire had cooled, the vessels became storage containers, water jugs and cooking vessels. Small cups and bowls were also sometimes made.

At Southern Indian and Big Sand lakes, the Cree pottery makers also made oval plates of various sizes. Most of these plates were likely used when cooking and eating meals. However, others may have been used in a much different way. They may have been used as lamps to light the people's birchbark homes during dark summer nights when the heat of a fire was not needed.

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Today, the broken fragments of this early pottery are used to learn about how people lived. Pottery can survive in the ground for thousands of years, and because of this durability it can give information about where people lived, how large their camps were and provide answers to a host of other questions about the past.

Dragonflies flitted through camp in search of their quarry as the people went about their daily tasks. The weather was warm as biting insects invaded the camp. The candle ice of late spring had finally broken up in the strong spring winds, and canoes were once again being used to carry large quantities of fish to the drying racks.

Wisps of spruce smoke drifted through the camp as women prepared food for the evening meal. They used baskets made of bark recently cut from the birch trees growing nearby. Fish boiled in a clay pot over the nearby fire. The people had returned to this camp only weeks before, having spent the winter in small camps far apart from other members of the group. But already, the bark dwellings had been repaired and were once again the focus of family life.

At this time of the year, the people talked about the events of the winter with friends and relatives from whom they had been separated for so many months. There was much to tell: stories of heavy snows, poor ice conditions, the birth of a child, a nephew killing his first moose, the death of a sister-in-law — all of the events that which had affected the lives of the camp members.

Spring camp was an exciting time for the children. Young cousins once again competed in target practice using bows and arrows made by a grandfather or uncle. Young girls helped their mothers prepare clay for making pottery. They later fashioned their first clay pots under the guidance of a helpful grandmother. Much of the play was practice for the duties that the young would assume as they grew older.

Returning to his family after lifting the fish nets, a young man bounced his first-born son on his knee. His work-toughened hands tickled a fat little stomach until a child's laughter was heard across the camp. This child was the future of the family.

open water allowed canoes to travel once more, new fish nets, made from spruce roots and willow, began to be lifted. These nets, developed a few generations earlier, allowed for large quanitites of food to be brought to the camp. This development was accompanied by population growth and expansion of the Cree northward into areas which had formerly been occupied by the Dené. With the spawning season over, the nets replaced the harpoons and the weir as the people's main device for obtaining food. Spring also brought beaver and muskrat meat to the smoke racks. Ducks and geese were netted or shot with stone-tipped arrows.

The fish were brought back to camp by the men and given to the women to clean, although if there had been a large lift, the men may have offered some help. There were racks with drying fish outside every tent. Dried fish and meat were pounded into a rough powder, mixed with berries and fat to form pemmican, and stored for later use in camp and while on hunting trips. Boiling fish oil was skimmed from clay pots and stored for later use. Smoked fish was a staple, since it kept for a considerable time. What was not used was fed to the dogs to keep them fit until they were put back to work in the winter.

As the weather warmed, women began to knead and work the clay which had been stored from the previous year. Water and grit, ground from stones that had been in the fire, were added to the clay. When finally prepared, the clay took the form of pottery vessels which were used to cook, store dried foods and fish oil, and to carry water. With the aid of their mothers and grandmothers, young girls helped with this task and, in so doing, learned how to make these vessels. A net- or fabric-covered paddle was used to beat the clay into the shape of the desired vessel.

The nod of approval from a grandmother kept the interest of a young girl who had worked hard on the project. And a handful of dried blueberries, sweetened with syrup from birch trees and boiled in one of these vessels, was an extra reward. Tradition dictated how the vessels were made, and for this reason the girl would always make and decorate her pots just like those formed by her grandmother and her grandmother before her. Baked stone-hard in a fire, the bowls, cups, large storage and cooking containers and, in some areas, even plates, were made to supply a host of needs.

The hunters from the camp spent considerable time searching for game. Moose was an important quarry. In the early morning or evening, the hunters travelled by canoe into a sheltered bay. They waited until their prey came for a drink, or to get away from the tormenting insects. Later in the summer moose also came to eat plants that grew in the shallow bays. A shot from a well-placed arrow brought the animal down. By coming to the same place as the hunter, it was believed the moose had offered itself to him. The moose was useful in many ways, and the hunters and their families all made certain they did not offend the animal by failing to treat it with respect. After a kill, a hunter would distribute portions of the meat to the other members of the camp so that no one would go without. During the meal, a piece of meat along with a prayer was offered to the fire out of respect for the animal, and in this way it was felt that its spirit would be released.

The hide would be brought to the women for preparation, and after it had been cleaned, scraped and smoked it would be made into clothing, or a tent cover. The leg bone would be made into a scraper, to

be used to remove the hair and fat from the hide. Sinew would be used to make bowstrings and to sew clothing. The bones were smashed and boiled to obtain the fat and marrow that would provide food energy during the long winter. Later, the shoulder blade of the moose might be used to help guide the hunters in their quest for a good winter camp; by burning this bone in a certain manner, it was believed that the future could be told.

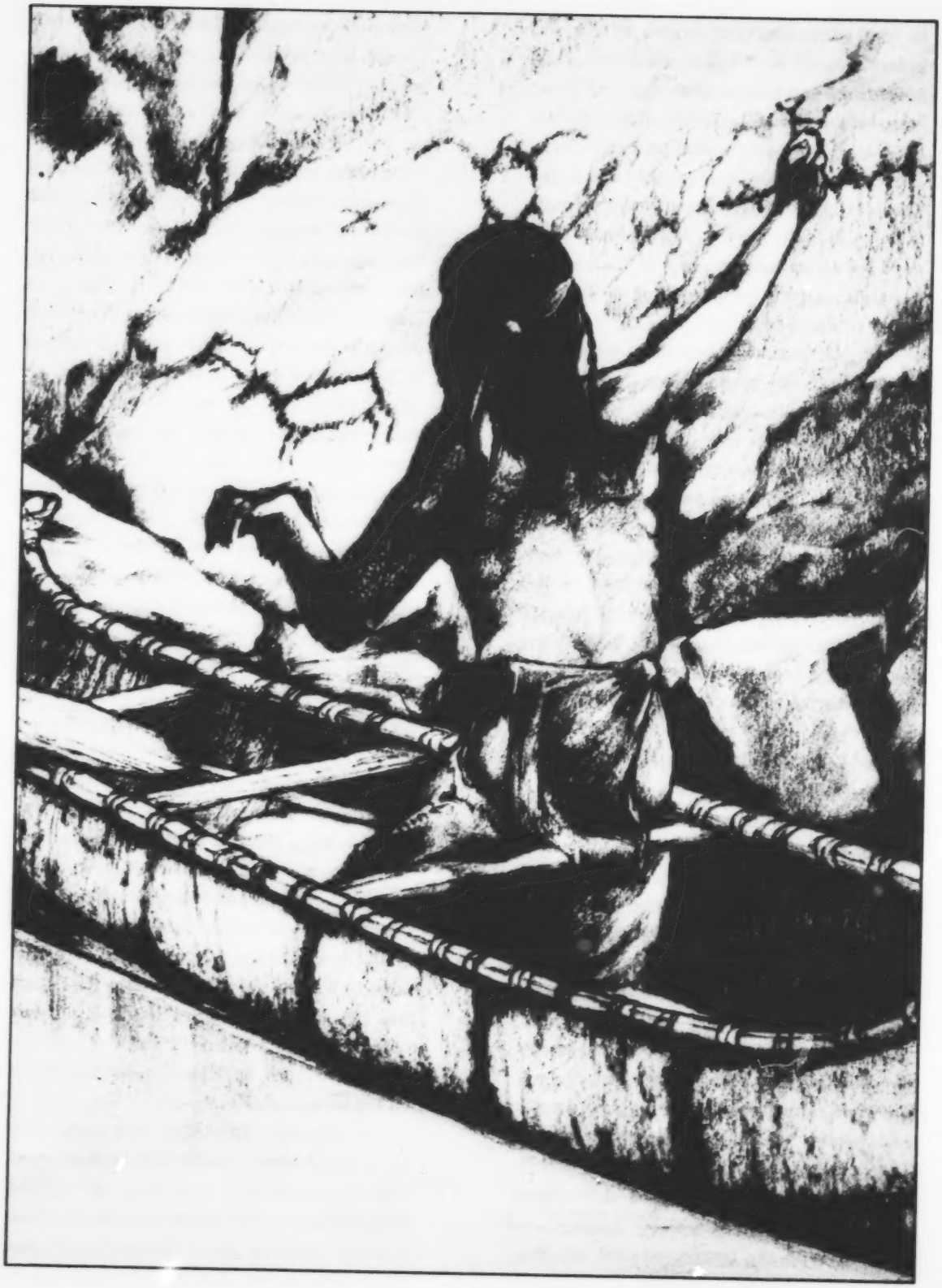
During the summer, when the families lived close together, other ceremonies were also held. This was the time of year when networks of related kin were extended through marriage. When a couple had reached maturity, plans which had possibly been made at their births were finally completed. Marriage was only allowed between certain members of the group; the children of a mother's brother and a father's sister were seen as the ideal marriage partners. The new couple usually lived with their in-laws until after the birth of a child when a new tent was then formed. Eventually, though, the couple lived with the father's group.

While summer was a time of leisure and feasting, preparation for winter was always underway. The warm season was short and much had to be done to get ready, for the return of Keewatin, the North Wind, was not far off. Clothing was patched and repaired. Worn out garments were replaced with new outfits -- stitched with sinew and decorated with fur trim and dyed porcupine quills in age-old designs. The dyes came from the land -- from mosses and berries which grew near the camps. The knowledge required for their preparation had been handed down from one generation to the next.

With the coming of cold weather, the people began to leave the summer camps. Once again, in families or in small groups, they headed to their fall and winter hunting areas. The large campsites were left behind, and soon the whiskey-jacks and the ravens were the only ones left at a place which had for months been so full of life. The birds cleaned up any edible scraps and pecked at the bear and beaver skulls which the people had hung as a gesture of respect in the trees around the camp.

When the small band arrived in its fall and winter areas, the hunters -- brothers or other close kin -- selected the place at which to build their first camp. Here a winter lodge was constructed, built like the summer one but with the poles placed closer together and covered with a thick, insulating cover of moss to keep out the cold. During the winter, the band usually had to move from one area to another to ensure that they did not kill too many animals in any one place. Roots and the last of any available summer berries were collected in large enough quantities to last the winter. These would add variety to the people's fare and supplement their diet of moose, dried fish, beaver and rabbit. The hunters canoed and walked through the area to plan for the cold season and to determine if it held adequate resources. As the first ice formed and the early snows fell, the canoes were cached and the equipment which had been left the previous spring was retrieved and repaired. The dogs were fed well and made ready for the sled. There was little to do but wait for the land to freeze, the snow to fall and safe ice to form on the lakes and rivers.

During this time, warm in the moss lodge which smelled so fresh because of the new spruce bough floor, the people told stories of past hunts and deeds. The children learned how the land and the people had been created. They also were

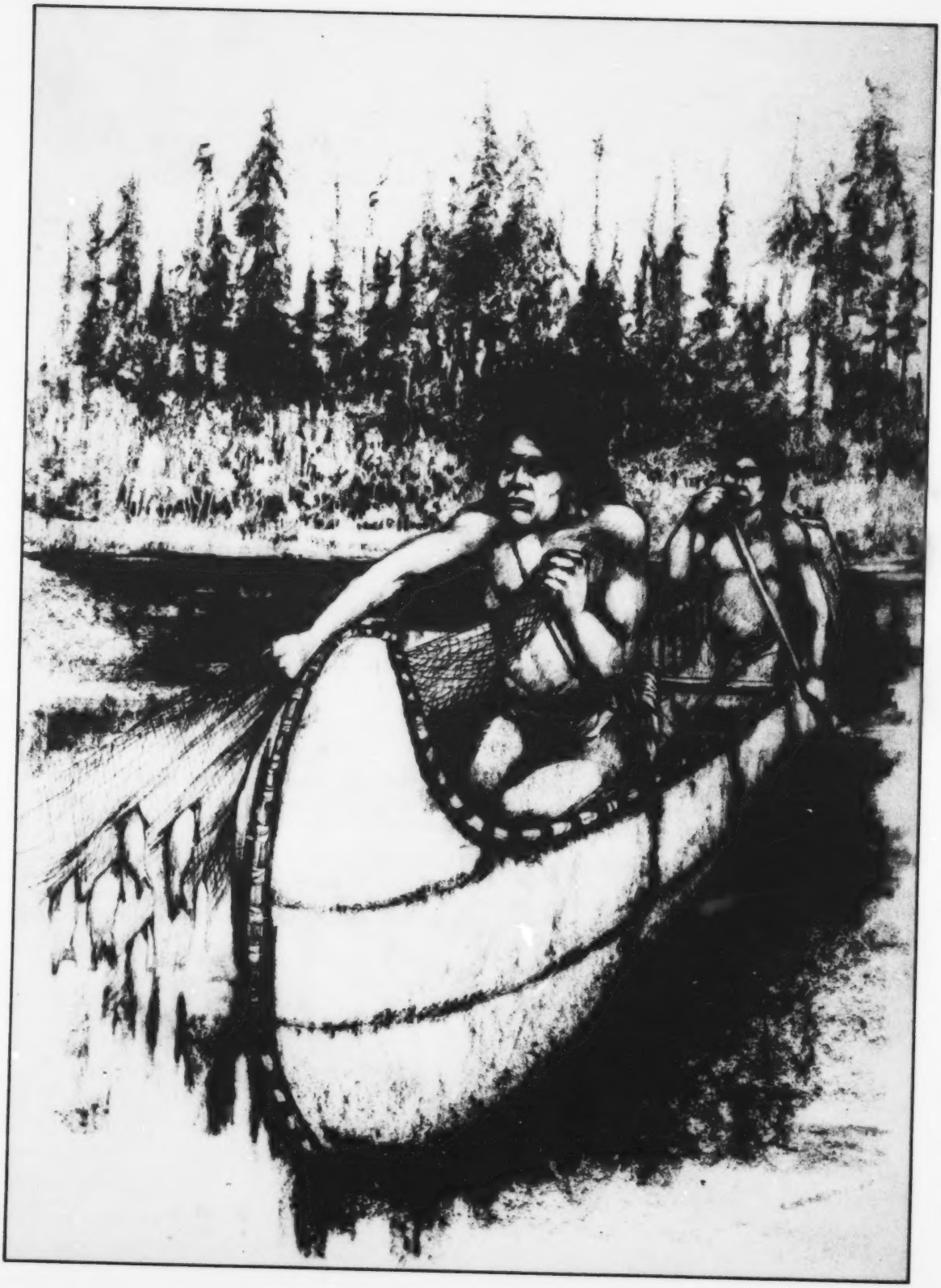


Deep in a hidden bay, away from the eyes of other members of his group, a religious leader, or shaman -- one who had acquired great spiritual powers -- drew his vision of the future on a smooth rock face. Using a brush and a special mixture of red ochre and sturgeon oil, he outlined a figure on the outcrop.

He had painted figures before. One was of a caribou enclosed by a circle of red paint. This "captured" animal ensured that members of its herd would come to the hunters during the winter season. Another drawing depicted a moose wounded by an arrow. This portent came true shortly after it had been made. Others contained messages from the Creator concerning a proper path of conduct for the people to follow throughout their lives.

At the foot of another nearby bay, there were other paintings on a similar rock face. The shaman believed these paintings were placed there by spirit people who lived inside the rocks -- the maymayguashiwuk. These paintings were also to act as guides to the right path of conduct through life.

When the shaman returned to his camp, he revealed none of the secrets of his powers to the others of his group, for this would have weakened his ability to see what was to come. However, he helped the members of his community towards this future through wise counsel. He also taught and trained a youngster who had been given the gift of this power to become a respected leader of his people.



Fish were always an important food to the early Cree families who have lived in the Land of the North Wind. During the spring, before the ice had completely left the lakes, the people trapped fish at stone weirs built across the mouths of streams. Later in the year, when the ice was gone and the waters were once again open, nets could be set from birchbark canoes to harvest the rich resources of fish found in the North. These nets were woven from spruce and willow roots, with stone sinkers and carved wooden floats. The nets were likely introduced to the northern groups from the south by people who had also brought with them pottery-making and, perhaps, the use of the bow and arrow. These southern peoples had joined their northern cousins in making a life for themselves in the forests of northern Manitoba beginning about 2000 years ago.

After the fish were lifted into the canoes and the nets were reset in the water for the next day's catch, the fish were cleaned and brought back to camp. Some were eaten fresh, boiled in clay pots or roasted in the fire. Others were smoked and dried on racks above a slow burning fire and stored for later use. Smoked fish could last for several days, even in the hottest weather, before they spoiled. Dried fish proved useful when bad weather kept the people in the camp, and provided a tasty change from boiled or roasted fare.

The regular and abundant supply of fish allowed large numbers of the people to gather in spring and summer fish camps along the shores of some of the major lakes in the Land of the North Wind. At some of these camps, several hundred came together to pass the summer and early fall. The large amounts of fish, supplemented by moose and other game, allowed the people to live a relatively easy life and gave them plenty of spare time to visit neighbours, give feasts and hold dances. The reliable fish supply, available from the nets, may have allowed the Cree population in the far northern areas of their lands to increase and expand their territory further northward.

The bull moose, the largest and, perhaps because of its size, one of the most dangerous of the animals of the forest, had been lured to the hunters by blowing into a moose call -- a rolled tube of birchbark. It was brought down with stone-tipped arrows.

After the moose was butchered, some of the meat was roasted over an open fire. Back at the camp, other portions were smoked and dried for later use. Some of the smoked meat was pounded into a fine powder and mixed with fat and berries. This mixture -- pemmican -- was eaten by the hunters while on the trail in quest of another moose. The fat and marrow from the moose was stored in clay pots and used during the rapidly approaching winter, when large amounts of fat were needed in the people's diet to keep them warm. Bones from the legs of the animal were cut and sharpened into scrapers and used to prepare the hide.

The group killed many moose during the course of the year. The moose provided considerable meat. Its hide was important in clothing and sheltering the people. To ensure that the hunters continued to be successful on their hunts, each animal was treated with respect after it was killed and thanks were given to the Creator every time the gift of a moose was received by the group.

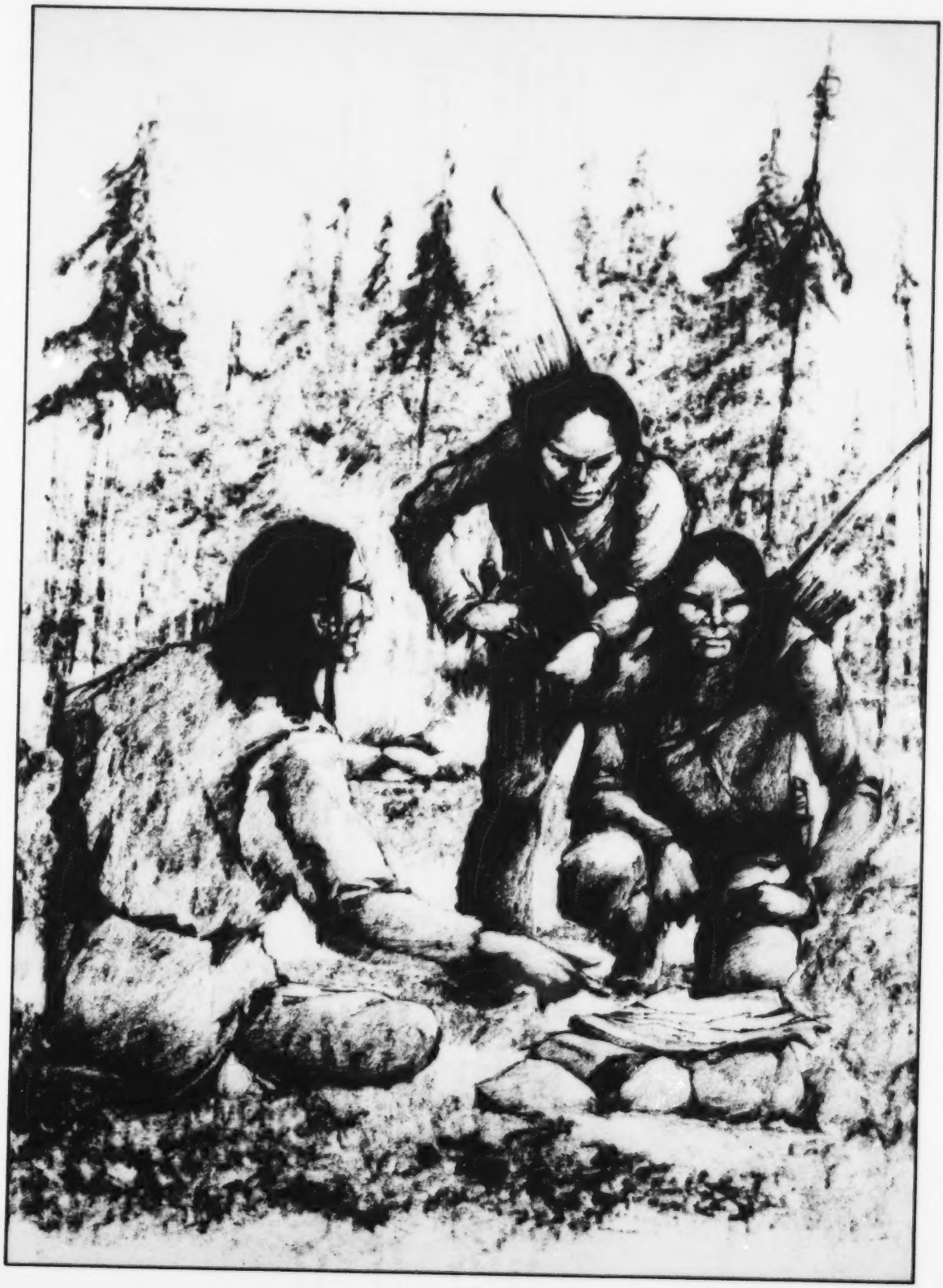
In the fall, during the mating season, bull moose were also lured to sounds that imitated those of bulls fighting over females.

During the summer, the winds blowing off of the lake helped keep the biting insects away from the camp. The baby, resting warm and comfortable in the tikanagan, was already familiar with the sounds of the scraper striking a fresh hide. Removal of this hair was the first step towards transforming the hide into clothing, carrying bags, or other items needed by the family. There was always a hide at some stage of preparation in the camp. The songs the woman sang while she worked was well-known by the little girl. Sometimes she joined in the singing as she helped her mother look after baby brother born the previous winter. Around them, aunts and cousins were busy cutting and drying meat and fish, making containers from birchbark and preparing other hides.

When the hair and fat were at last removed, the hide was soaked in a mixture of water and moose brains to soften and preserve it. It was then washed, wrung out and smoked over a low fire made from rotten birch tree stumps and willow sticks. The smoking also helped to preserve the hide, while the willow added a light brown colour.

Sharp stone knives were used to cut the hide into pieces. A garment was sewn together using bone needles and thin strands of sinew. These skills were given to the woman by her mother and grandmother. She had learned them the same way her little girl learned -- by watching and imitating the grown-up's tasks while at play.

When the hide was removed from the frame, another took its place.



By preparing the shoulder blade of a moose recently taken in the hunt and burning it in a certain manner, hunters believed they would be given an insight into the future.

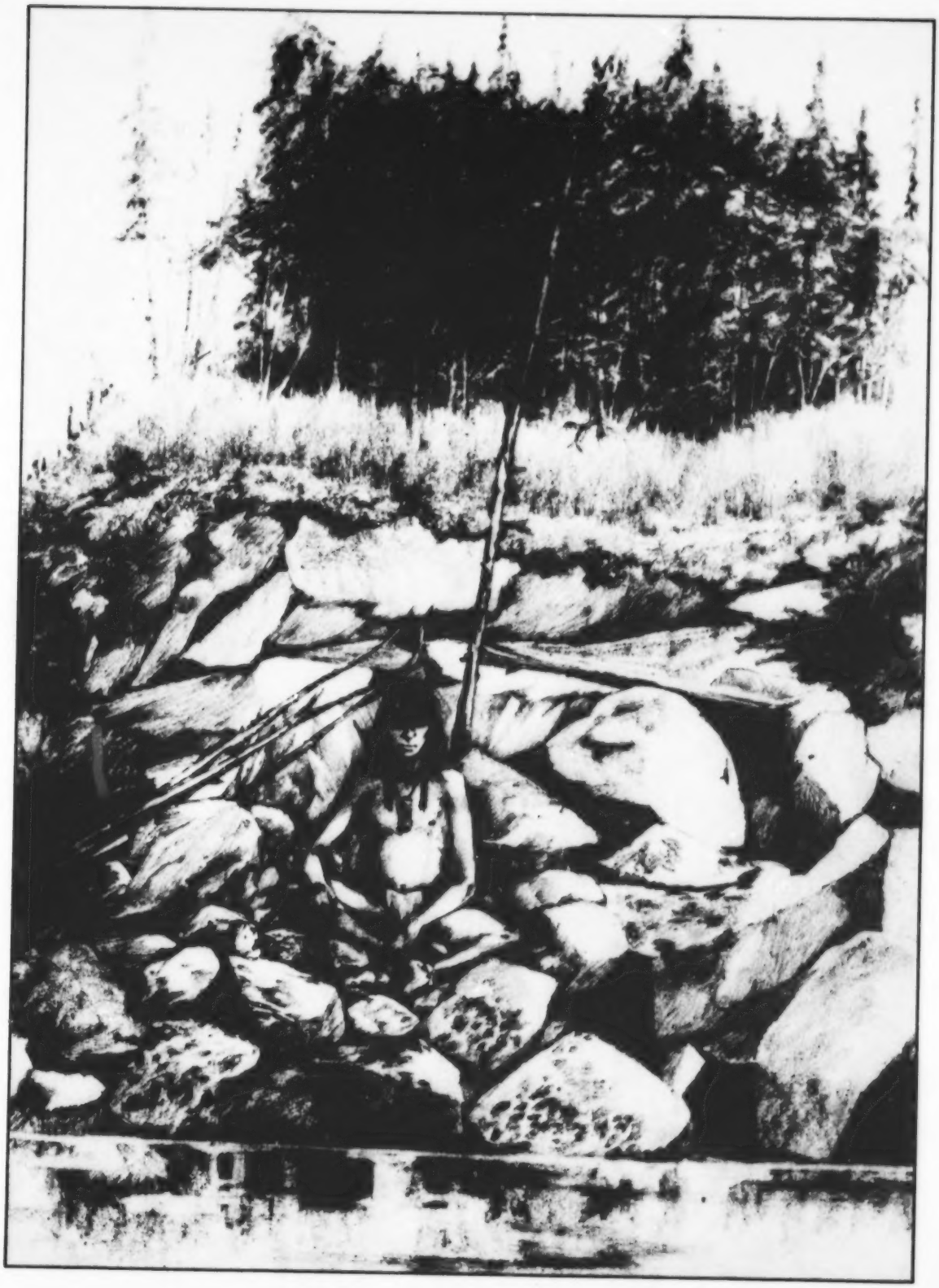
Placed over the fire, the bone began to crack and lines similar to a map formed across its broad blade. It was believed that one could recognize the land from this map which spread across the bone, and that the directions in which the cracks proceeded told the hunters where to spend the winter, or where to travel for caribou hunting in the fall. To be able to interpret such a map and to travel to the area which proved to contain needed resources was a valued gift. A skilled interpreter of these signs was an important member of the group.

The ceremony of purification was held in honour of a young man coming of age. For this ceremony, his uncle provided counsel. The uncle had been with him when the boy, using knowledge taught to him by this wise elder, had killed his first moose. He had sat and watched as his uncle had shown him how to make tools from the stones given as gifts to the people by the Creator. The uncle had also explained the stories of the birth of the land, about the animals that shared the land with the people, and about the origins of the people themselves.

While watching and learning about the importance of the events which were about to take place, the boy was reminded by this uncle of the importance of sharing his hunt with his group and the showing of respect for all Creation. These values would remain with him for the rest of his life.

The fire was tended by another young man who had proven himself worthy of this honour. The rocks were piled in the age-old way, and the wood placed around them according to custom. After the celebrants entered the sweat lodge from the left side and moved around the lodge to the right, they sat in a circle. The rocks were passed in to the host of the sweat ceremony and piled in the middle of the lodge in the traditional way. The container of water was placed outside the door to the lodge, and dippers full of water were taken inside and thrown on the hot rocks.

The steam that rose and filled the lodge purified those inside, and the celebrants offered their songs to the Great Spirit. The boy had been taught these songs and their meanings by his uncle in preparation for this event. When the celebration was over, the participants plunged into a nearby stream to cool off. The young man was now an adult among his people. He would earn respect for this new status by showing how well he understood the responsibilities of being a good provider and, eventually, a leader in the group. The sweat lodge would continue to be an important focus throughout his life. Other ceremonies and events important to the people were centered around this structure hidden deep in the forest of the Land of the North Wind.



After being purified by the steam of the sweat lodge and participating in rituals as old as his people, the young boy fasted and awaited his future. By fasting, the boy hoped to see a vision of the animal spirit which would become his personal guardian and helper for the rest of his life.

As the days passed, the rocks around him seemed to alter their form and begin to move. Faces of animals began to appear and disappear. A weasel darted its head in and out of a cleft between the rocks and vanished -- this was not the one. The rhythmic sounds of waves lapping against the shore took the boy deeper into his trance; and in the reflections of the sun dancing off the water, other creatures slipped in and out of view.

Alone, along the edge of a small lake in the Land of the North Wind, the boy was lost in his thoughts. Finally, the raven took pity on him and came to him and watched for awhile. He then showed himself to the boy and agreed to become his ally by this appearance.

Later, back in the camp after another ritual sweat, the boy, one stage closer to manhood, began his relationship with his life-long guardian at a feast held in their honour by offering a gift -- his song of thanks to the raven for coming to him. It was believed that for the rest of his life, the boy received guidance and help from the raven.

Summer was a period of intense social activity and a time of plenty for the Cree in the Land of the North Wind. During this time of year, the people gathered together in large groups at fishing camps along the edges of major lakes. With substantial amounts of food in the form of fresh, dried and smoked fish, there was considerable leisure time. Youngsters were able to play far into the long summer evenings at games which taught them skills they would need as they grew to adulthood. Men and women gathered in small groups to busy themselves in work relating to their roles in the society in which they lived. Men made and repaired fish nets, cut and carved new hunting equipment, and patiently chipped stone knives or points to attach to spears and arrows. Conversations about the hunt and weather conditions were interspersed with jokes and stories about a host of topics important to them. Would fall be early? Where would each person spend the winter and who would share a winter camp? Had any fresh signs of moose been found nearby?

Women busied themselves at preparing fish, stretching hides, and making pottery and clothing. Their conversations revolved more around the family and friends than around the hunt -- when a child was due to be born, how well a young daughter had learned to make pottery, expressions of sorrow at the loss of a son to drowning.

Each day, more fish, ducks and geese were brought to camp and prepared. On occasion, a moose or bear was added to the food supply and shared by the hunter who brought it into camp. A feast of thanks for Nature's bounty was followed by a dance which could last into the next day, or until the people tired. The bear's skull was placed in a tree, because it would have been disrespectful to casually throw parts of such a noble animal about the campsite or into the forest. To show disrespect could mean that the next bear might not offer himself to the hunter. It was considered wise to ensure that all of Creation was treated with respect, for to do less courted disaster and possible starvation for family and friends.

The summer fish camps were returned to year after year, because the lakes contained inexhaustable resources. Summer was an enjoyable time of year if the biting insects were not too bad; friends were close at hand and the weather was mild.

Full of life and laughter during the summer months, an abandoned camp became the home of the whiskey-jack and raven in the late fall. The large gathering of people who had lived there during the summer broke up, and families dispersed to their small winter camps to pass the cold season.

Broken clay pots, bones, scraps of hide, fish skulls and feathers lay among the drying racks and piles of unburned firewood left behind when the camp was vacated. Stone knives and scrapers, lost or forgotten by the people, rested where they were last used. Piles of stone "flakes" from making tools also lay on the ground. The ashes from the cold campfires blew in the wind across moccasin-flattened mosses. Ravens and whiskey-jacks pecked at the bones on the ground, attempting to get at the last speck of remaining meat. A hungry fox gnawed at a fish skull and carried the bones away before the first snows blanketed the land. The bear and beaver skulls, placed with respect in the trees by the people, were also cleaned of meat by the ravens.

Soon winter descended and hid the remnants of the camp. If it was a harsh winter, a small, worn scrap of hide, discarded on the drying rack, became a meal for a fox or wolf. Much of what was left behind was used by the creatures of the forest.

In the spring, the people returned once again and removed their caches of birchbark from winter storage. The empty poles were again covered and became warm homes for the residents of the camp. Fish hung from the drying racks over a smoking fire, and laughter echoed across the lake.

However, one spring no one returned and the camp remained empty. The forest soon began to reclaim the area as its own. Fireweed and mosses grew over the remains which had been left behind. As trees began to cover the area, the last of the poles and racks fell to the ground and eventually rotted away. Soon, no signs remained of the many activities that the camp had witnessed.

Until a forest fire passed across the area and burned away the mosses and trees, revealing the hearths and potsherds, or until another group at another time decided to make this small part of the North their home, the camp lay forgotten.

During the long winter months, camp had to be moved often because it was possible to over-hunt an area and so diminish the animal population that it could no longer support the hunters and their families. It was late in the day when the people arrived at their second camp of the season and began to set up.

The people had developed a technology that was well suited to their winter environment. Toboggans, snowshoes and the dogteam all helped to make winter travel an easier task. Clothing made from the animals taken in the hunt kept the families warm even in the coldest temperatures of mid-winter. Insulated houses, constructed from logs and thick layers of moss, were a welcome retreat from the icy winter winds.

A well-protected area had been selected to build this camp. It was near the edge of a small lake but out of the direct force of the prevailing northwesterly winds. This was the second year these dwellings haa been used, and therefore little effort was needed to prepare them for use once again. Piles of moss had been gathered and cached during a summer visit to the area for this purpose.

The packs of warm bedrolls were laid out on fragrant spruce boughs, and meat for the evening meal was brought from the cache. The warm fire comforted weary bodies, and roast moose meat gave them renewed energy. It had been a long walk from their first winter camp, and sleeping for two frigid nights in the open, under a quickly erected hide shelter, had been difficult for the old man and the two young babies who formed part of this group. Winter was a hard time of year, but if the weather remained stable and ice conditions were good, the hunters could continue to enjoy success. This was the way of life of the Cree for countless generations.

Warm and secure in their winter camp, the families welcomed a group of hunters returning with a fresh supply of meat.

The winter dwellings were made from poles set closely together and covered with a thick insulating layer of moss. A central fire kept the occupants warm. The floors, made with soft spruce boughs, were frequently changed to keep the dwelling clean. The fresh smell of spruce greeted the hunters as they went inside to rest after their labours.

The women prepared the product of the hunt, and the sputter of roasting meat soon mingled with the sounds of the crackling fire. Seated on warm furs to keep away the cold, the group listened to stories told about their land by an old woman who had seen three generations born into her family. The sun set early and rose late on cold winter days; and the stories, as well as games and small chores such as dressing furs, passed the time until the family retired beneath their fur robes and rabbit blankets. The hoot of a nearby owl was nearly lost to the cold winds whistling through the spruce trees outside. A sled dog howled at some other sound of the forest. Warm and well fed, the family talked about the events of the day until they drifted off.

In the cold early morning, little children huddled close together under their fur covers and watched an older sister add wood and blow the ashes of the previous night's fire into life again. Another winter day in the Land of the North Wind had begun.

The rabbits snared by the women on a warm day in the late winter added variety to the food supply of the family camp. It had been a good year, as moose, beaver and even caribou meat had formed much of the diet of the camp. Berries collected in the summer or late in the fall, after the people had moved to their first winter camp, also formed part of their meals.

The rabbit skins were dried and cut into long strips with a sharp stone knife. These narrow strips were then woven into soft blankets to keep the newborn baby warm, or used as insulation in a pair of moosehide moccasins.

Walking back to camp along the winter trail, through the tangled forest and open muskegs, the women checked other sets and selected new spots for other snares. The forest was calm and silent except for the call of a distant raven, and a whiskey-jack followed the women home.

After the women had dressed and cleaned their kill, the camp dogs received a rabbit along with their normal fare of frozen fish. As the sun set on the lengthening winter day, rabbit, moose and caribou satisfied the hunger of the people. In other years, when hunting had been poor, rabbit meat often kept the people from going hungry.

The beaver which had been taken on that early winter day provided both food and clothing for the northerners. The meat was roasted over the open fire, and the hide stretched and cleaned. Later, a warm coat was made by stitching the hides together.

Other furs were needed by the people for blankets and robes, trim on winter coats and fur mitts, and for covering the floors of their winter homes.

The importance of furs within the lives of the people changed radically when the people began to trade their pelts for the newly-introduced metal knives, axes, copper pots or glass beads brought to the Land of the North Wind by European traders or Native middlemen. Then, furs became a commodity used to obtain the items that the people had learned to value.

Major changes to the way of life of the people were caused by this trade in furs. No longer were all of the items they needed made from locally available materials. The people then became part of an economic system which reached across continents and on which they eventually became dependant.

told the stories of the animals with whom they shared their lives, and about spirits, good and bad, that lived around them. The children learned how to please the spirits that were good, and how to protect themselves from those that were evil. Some stories were simply amusing, being tricks on words, while others were absurd tales that made everyone laugh. This laughter cut the silence of the lengthening nights of early winter. Around them, Keewatin -- the north wind -- increased its strength and the land grew cold.

For the next six months, the people hunted and brought back game to the camp. Skins were stretched and smoked and the furs which were needed were prepared and cured. When a moose was killed, or if the camp was in an area that was visited by the caribou, it was unnecessary to go hunting for weeks on end. During these times of plenty, games of chance helped fill the people's time, and youngsters in the camp learned from their elders more about the land and how to make a living from it. Good hunting meant that a few families might be able to gather together for short periods of time. However, if hunting was poor, the men might have to range far from camp and would be gone for days before they returned with food. If it was a hard winter, hunger could begin to stalk the people and they might have to flee a Witigo. Such a fate was in the back of the minds of many if the game disappeared from their area. But this was not a common occurrence, because the people were careful to observe the rules which brought them the game, and only occasionally were such creatures ever seen. Stories about a Witigo were enough to ensure respect for the tried-and-true rules of everyday life.

As the days began to lengthen and the south wind, Sawanahan, warmed the land, preparations were made for the move to an early spring camp or immediately back to the main fish camp. As another winter came to an end, there was excitement about moving to the big camp, and all that went with being close to kin again. Much of the winter equipment was set aside as the people headed towards the fishing grounds. A full year had passed and all of the activities of their seasonal round were about to begin again.

The story of the Land of the North Wind is left at a time when the biggest change in the lives of the Oldtimers was about to take place. Another people, strangers who came in ships from across the sea, were about to make their presence felt in this area. At first it was only rumour, made known via the network of groups across the land. Later, new kinds of tools were brought into the area by people from the east and south who traded them for the beaver coats the people wore. Some of these tools and other items proved to be very useful indeed. The local people were told if they wanted more of these tools they would have to get more beaver.

As time passed, some of these ships arrived on the shores of Hudson Bay, and the strangers, who called themselves Englishmen, built trading posts at the mouths of the rivers. In very short order, it became clear to the people that they held the upper hand in obtaining favourable rates of exchange, good quality merchandise, and trade items that were not only pleasing to the eye, but well suited to their way of life and the sub-arctic environment in which the goods would be used. Home-made, traditional tools fashioned from bone, stone and wood could

be easily repaired or replaced locally with new items made of the same materials. However, guns, knives, hatchets, kettles, awls and firesteels could not be repaired without the services of a blacksmith, and since so few of the people actually lived near the posts, defective or broken tools obtained through trade could only be fixed or replaced once a year. As a result, the people became highly critical of shoddy goods and very demanding of high quality craftsmanship -- and the Englishmen had little recourse but to comply. In fact, it was in large part because of the people's insistance on good quality trade goods that the Englishmen established blacksmith shops at the posts so that tools were manufactured locally to an acceptable standard. To ensure that the Englishmen did not falter in the supply of quality merchandise, the people reminded them that the Frenchmen, situated to the southeast, were more than willing to accept their business. Indeed, the people so successfully pitted the English and the French against each other that the Europeans had no choice but to match their competitors in quality, variety and cost of goods.

With the coming of the Europeans and the establishment of the fur trade, the history of change among the Oldtimers entered yet another phase. The influences and challenges of this new order were of a nature and magnitude quite unlike anything that had ever come before, and the long-term effects upon the people's lifeways would be profound indeed .... but that is another story.

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